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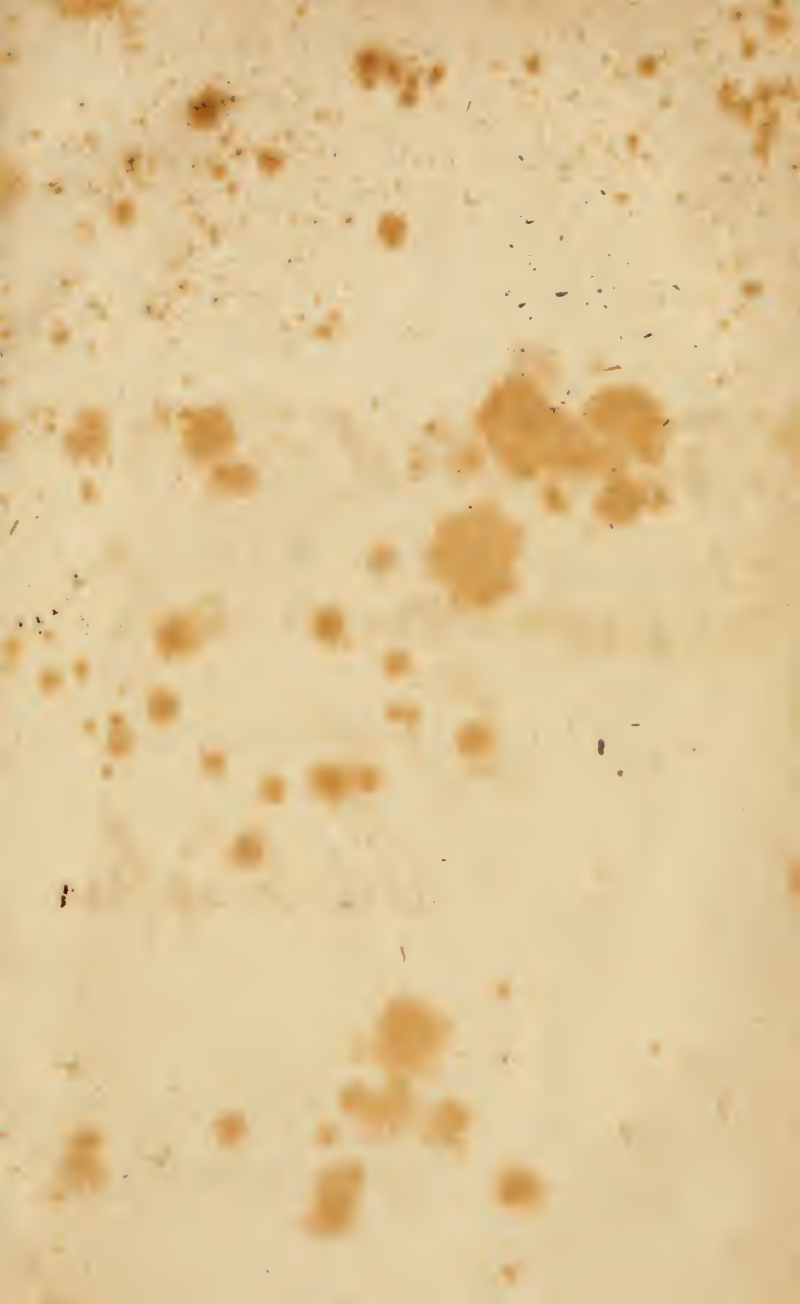
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Comfort in affliction

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COMFORT IN AFFLICTION:

A SERIES OF

MEDITATIONS,

BY

JAMES BUCHANAN, D.D.

FREE CHURCH, EDINBURGH.

“This is my Comfort in mine affliction: for thy Word hath quickened me.”

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TO THE AFFLICTED.

MOURNERS in Zion, be comforted ! if yours be a life of sorrow, yours also is a religion of hope. If the book of Providence seem to you to be “written within and without,” like Ezekiel’s roll, in characters of “lamentation, and mourning, and woe,” the Bible is filled with consolation and peace ; and the more stormy your passage through this world, the more awful God’s judgments, the more severe and confounding your trials and bereavements may be, the more should that blessed book be endeared to your hearts, of which every true disciple will say, with the afflicted Psalmist, “ *This is my comfort in mine affliction.*”

It is not one of the least benefits of severe affliction, that it shatters our confidence in every other stay, and breaks up our hopes from every other quarter, and leads us, in simplicity, to search the Word of God for comfort ; nor is it one of the least recommendations of that precious book, that its characters become more bright in proportion as all else around us is dark, and that, when all other information becomes insipid or

nauseous, its truths are rendered only the more sweet and refreshing by the bitter draught of sorrow. The Bible cannot be known in its excellence, nor its truths relished in their sweetness, nor its promises duly appreciated and enjoyed, until, by adversity, all other consolation is lost, and all other hopes destroyed ; but then, when we carry it with us into the fiery furnace of affliction, like the aromatic plant, which must be burnt before the precious perfume is felt, it emits a refreshing fragrance, and is relished in proportion as our sufferings are great. Glorious peculiarity ! other books may amuse the hours of ease ; other knowledge may suffice to pass the short day of prosperity, but this book only is for the hour of sorrow ; this knowledge comes to my aid when all other knowledge fails ; and, like the sweet stars of heaven, the truths of God shine most brightly in the darkest night of sorrow.

And why is it so ? Is it because the Bible denies the existence of sorrow and suffering ? or, because it represents the afflictions of life as being few in number, or easy to be borne ? Does it seek to withdraw our attention from them ? or, does it ridicule the feelings which such afflictions awaken, and enjoin a heartless indifference to whatever may befall us ? Does it mock the friendships of nature, and scorn our feelings when these friendships are broken up by bereavement ? God forbid ! On the contrary, the Bible proceeds on the assumption that sorrow and suffering *prevail* in the world ; that all, without exception, are liable to their depressing influence, and, so far from representing them

as being few in number, or easy to be borne, it presents a picture of human life, which, in the season of youth and hope, many may be disposed to regard as gloomy and exaggerated, but which, in the hour of sorrow, comes home to the heart as the only faithful representation of this state of trial. It declares to every disciple, that in "the world he *shall* have tribulation," and that, although "trouble springs not from the dust, nor sorrow from the ground, yet man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards." Nor does it seek to withdraw our attention from the afflictions of life; on the contrary, it presses them on our regard; it declares them to be a proper and salutary subject of contemplation, and affirms, "that it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of mirth." And, in doing so, it is far from enjoining us to contemplate any scene of sorrow, with heartless indifference, or stoical unconcern. That religion which commands us to "weep with those who weep," cannot be supposed to condemn the tears which we shed over our own sorrows or bereavements; nor can its Divine Author, who *wept* over the grave of Lazarus, be regarded as the pattern of his people, if, unlike him, they are to derive their support in the hour of sorrow from the suppression of those feelings which nature prompts, and of those tears which nature sheds, over the grave of friendship. And if stoical apathy and indifference be not enjoined, far less does the Bible sanction or countenance that bitter ridicule of human suffering, and that sarcastic contempt of human life, which, in the

madness of despair, some have been tempted to indulge, and which has led them to strip man of his rightful dignity, and life of its due importance, and to regard the chequered scene of his existence with misanthropic bitterness, and even the last tragic scene of dissolution with morbid unconcern. Ah! little would such a scheme have suited the hearts which God hath given us! but the Bible breathes the spirit of compassion over all our sorrows; its Divine Author sympathizes with us in the lowest depths of our affliction; he ridicules not even the weakness of nature, but tenderly upbids the heart when it bleeds; for, "*even as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,*" and that divine pity breathes throughout every page of Scripture.

The grand peculiarity of the Bible, as a book of consolation, is, that while it seeks not to cast our sufferings into the shade, but rather sets them before us in all their variety and magnitude, it teaches us to find consolation in the midst of acknowledged sorrow, and causes light to arise out of the deepest darkness. In many respects, it gives a more gloomy view of human life than we are oftentimes willing to entertain. It represents affliction as *ordained* for us, and *appointed* so that it cannot be escaped. It tells us that our future life will be chequered with trials, even as the past has been. It gives no assurance of respite from suffering, so long as we are in this world. And, when it traces these afflictive events to their causes,—when it represents suffering as the fruit and the wages of sin,—when

it charges us with guilt, and affirms that we have provoked the Lord to anger,—when it leads us to regard our sorrows as connected with our characters, and inflicted by a righteous governor and judge,—and when, carrying our eye beyond this world altogether, it points to an eternal state of retribution, where sorrows infinitely more severe, and judgments infinitely more confounding, await impenitent and unforgiven guilt,—it does present such a view of our present condition and future prospects, as may well fill us with awe and alarm;—and yet still it is the book of consolation; still it contains the elements of peace, the seed of hope, the well-spring of eternal joy. It is out of the very darkness of our present state and our eternal prospects, that the brightness of that dawn appears which shall issue in everlasting day; the golden rays of divine light and love appear in the midst of that thick cloud; the cup of bitterness is sweetened by an infusion of mercy, so that the Christian can be “joyful in the midst of tribulation,” and “greatly rejoice, though now, for a season, *if need be*, he is in heaviness, through manifold temptations.”

For, while the Bible spreads out to our view the whole scene of human life, chequered with every variety of shade, it raises our eye above it, and reveals a superhuman and spiritual System, which stretches over and comprehends every part of it,—a System founded on principles which are as fixed as the incidents of human life are fluctuating,—a System which overrules every event that may happen, and determines them all,

however casual they may seem to be, to some great and lofty end,—a System which, although in its immensity it is incomprehensible, and, in many of its bearings, mysterious, is, nevertheless, when in any measure understood, a great and lofty System, and obscure only because of its transcendent grandeur,—which gives stability to what was before uncertain, and throws light on what was formerly dark, and imparts regularity and order to what might otherwise seem to be a world not only of vicissitude, but of chance. It is by revealing this spiritual and superhuman System, that the Bible seeks to elevate our minds out of the depression which the present aspects of the world might occasion; not by concealing the dark aspect of “things seen and temporal,” but by bringing into view along with them, the glory of “things unseen and eternal;” not by disputing the reality of those afflictions which we feel, and underrating their magnitude, but by showing us their necessity and suitableness, as means under a higher economy than that of the present life—an economy which stretches from eternity to eternity—which comprehends in its course all orders of creatures, and every class of events, and which controls and overrules them all for the promotion of an end worthy of the magnitude of the scheme, and infinitely important to ourselves.

Believing that the Bible furnishes the only rational account of the origin and design of suffering under God’s government, the only genuine and abiding source of consolation under sorrow, and the only sure antidote

against the fears which must ever be associated with a sense of guilt, I propose to select from Scripture, and to illustrate, in a short series of Meditations, the principal topics which bear on this subject, so as both to justify God in his ways of dealing with men, and to point out the method of deliverance and the grounds of hope which he has offered for their consolation and comfort.

MEDITATION 1.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION:”

“*The Lord reigneth.*”—Ps. xcvi. 1.

THE Bible lays a solid ground for our comfort, when it assures us that all things are under the government of God.

He superintends the affairs of this world, both as the provident parent and as the moral governor of his creatures.

The Bible declares that God created them, and that whatsoever beings he deigned to create, he does not disdain to care for. It assures us that no being is so great as to be exempt from his control, and none so little as to be beneath his regard; and, in like manner, that his eye is directed to every event which may befall any one of his creatures, no event being either so momentous or so insignificant, as to be beyond his management or unworthy of his notice. The sparrow which falleth to the earth is not less an object of his regard than the seraph that stands before his throne.

That all his creatures in this world, and all the events of human life, of what kind soever they may be, are under *any* kind of regulation or control, is, of itself, fitted to banish that feeling of uncertainty and hopelessness which the aspect of events might otherwise awaken. And how important to know that nothing happens by chance,—that every thing is ordained and appointed according to certain principles which are fixed and stable, and that these principles will continue to be developed, till the grand end of God's government shall have been attained!

But, however important this information may be, it could ill suffice to cheer the heart amidst its sorrows, or to inspire that living hope which alone can bear us up under their heavy pressure, were we not farther assured, that the government under which we live is conducted by a God of infinite *intelligence* and *wisdom*—a being who cannot err—one who knows the end from the beginning, and is alike incapable of choosing an improper end, or of employing unsuitable means for its attainment. A persuasion of God's perfect wisdom in the management of our affairs is the more needful, in proportion as we feel our own helplessness, and are taught, by disappointments and trials, that our affairs are too high and too great to be managed by ourselves; and when assured of this precious truth, we shall the more readily submit to all his appointments, satisfied, that although we know not the plan of his operations, yet it is known and approved of by One whose wisdom is the best guarantee of the universe. And thus, too,

will the idea of *blind fate* be excluded, not less than the idea of *chance*,—that fate in which many have found a miserable refuge, when they saw too much uniformity in nature to warrant the belief that it was governed by chance.

Still the heart desiderates something more. It is not enough that the world is neither left to the random vicissitudes of chance, nor governed by a blind and inexorable fate. It is not enough for our comfort to know that a God of infinite intelligence presides over its affairs, and that its laws are the emanations of his wisdom. Great and glorious as these discoveries are, the heart longs to know the *character*, not less than the wisdom of that Almighty Being, and to be made acquainted, if not with his secret purposes, at least with the nature of his moral perfections, and his dispositions towards ourselves. It were a small consolation to reflect, that our affairs are managed by infinite wisdom, could we, without a contradiction, imagine, notwithstanding, that such a being is indifferent to our welfare, or that he might be disposed to relinquish our cause, from a regard to other interests more important; or, more awful still, that his wisdom existed apart from love, and was associated with such dispositions as could prompt the purpose, and such power as must insure the accomplishment, of our ruin. And but for the revelation of his true character, the heart which stands most in need of consolation, might be the most apt to entertain the sad conclusion, that God cared not for its sorrows or joys; for, when bleeding under the stroke

of affliction, and stunned by the shock of bereavement, we contemplate the dark and uncertain aspects of the present world, it requires no slight knowledge of God's *moral* perfections, and no weak or wavering confidence in his intentions, to still the tumult of grief, and arrest the progress of grief towards despair.

But here, as at every other point of peril, the Bible comes to our aid ; and, as if this point were the most perilous of all, it throws such a flood of light on the moral character and benevolent dispositions of God, as may well warrant the supposition that it was mainly given to convince us of his love, and to enable us to cherish the most confident trust in his faithfulness and mercy, even when the aspects of his providence are the most trying to our patience and faith.

The Bible declares the perfect *rectitude* of the divine character. It assures us that "he is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works." It represents him as the Righteous Governor of the universe, whose laws are in perfect consistency with the principles of equity, and whose character is in accordance with his laws. Referring to those principles of morality which are engraven on the heart of man, it declares that they were engraven by the finger of God, and that conscience is his vicegerent, speaking to us in his name, and making known to us the principles of his moral administration. And it unfolds a more copious code of morality, in which the same principles are revealed, for our better information and surer guidance,—principles which, being engraven in the book of nature, and revealed in the

written Word, are infallibly certain, and ought to be regarded as a true manifestation of the righteous character of Him, who is the author alike of nature and of revelation. By both, we are assured that unerring rectitude governs the universe,—that nothing in the shape of evil will be permitted to befall us, which is not in perfect consistency with justice ; and that God will exercise such discernment in his treatment of men, as omniscient wisdom, combined with infinite rectitude, alone could insure.

Were we assured only of the infinite wisdom and rectitude of that government under which we live, we might derive from these considerations, if not a good reason of hope, at least a sufficient motive to silent resignation ; but it were more consoling still, did we know that our governor and judge is not only wise and righteous, but favourably disposed towards us, and interested in our welfare. Power, wisdom, and rectitude, render the character of an earthly sovereign venerable and august ; but *love* to his subjects gives him the more endearing character of the father of his people. And such a father is God to all his subjects. Every where throughout his vast dominions does his benevolence extend,—a benevolence which, like the light and heat of the sun, diffuses itself over all lands, and, while it gilds the scene of joy and prosperity, penetrates also the lowliest cot, and cheers the deepest scene of sorrow. Go where you will, the kindness of God appears ; all nature bears witness to its bounty, “ the earth is *full* of its *richness*.” Look to the

structure of nature, the constitution of your own being, and the course of providence, and in each, you will discern such proofs of his love, condescension, and care, as may well assure you of his interest in your welfare, and of his disposition to make you happy. Had he been indifferent to human happiness, or disposed to inflict unnecessary suffering, why that admirable adaptation betwixt your faculties, and the objects by which they are at once exercised and gratified? Why that adequate supply in nature for every craving of desire within you? Why that beauty which delights the eye, that music which charms the ear, that air which refreshes and invigorates, that food which nourishes the body? Why those facilities of obtaining knowledge, and those powers of enjoying it in the hour of sweet meditation? Why does the sun keep its appointed time, and the moon her seasons? Why does the rain fall and the dew distil? Why does spring prepare the ground, and summer raise the blade, and autumn yield her fruit? Why, but that God who governs all, cares and provides for us, as a father for his children? Else, where now there is harmony, might not opposition have existed betwixt the faculties of our being, and the objects by which we are surrounded? Might not appetite have been made to crave, and no supply have been provided? Might not an eye longing for beauty, have opened only on deformity? Might not the ear which loves the music of sweet sounds, have been distracted by discord? The air which now refreshes and invigorates, might have been an oppressive or noxious exhalation.

instead of nourishing food, we might have had husks, or garbage, or poison : those faculties of thought and reflection which constitute our highest dignity, might have been withheld, and we should have resembled the beasts that perish, or they might have been so disordered and deranged in their operation, that they would toil in vain, and only err the more the farther they seemed to carry us : or the objects and laws of nature, and the truths of science and religion, might have been hid in impenetrable mystery, or so complicated as to mock the utmost efforts of our powers. And when the reverse of all this is the case, shall we not acknowledge that nature herself bears ample proof, in the structure of our being, and the provision which has been made for our happiness, that God is *good* as well as *great*, that his benevolence is as vast as his wisdom, and that our wellbeing is matter of his concern, even as our being itself was derived from his will.

Nature can carry us thus far, and thus far it carries us with the sanction of Scripture. That blessed book assures us that “God is love,”—that “his tender mercies are over all his works,”—that “he is good unto all,”—and that “he has never left himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

Viewing ourselves as subjects of his government, surely these considerations, drawn from the simplest elements of religion, should exercise some influence over our hearts, when we meditate on the chequered

scene of human life. When we contemplate the numerous dangers to which we are exposed, our own ignorance of the means of securing safety, and our utter want of command, in some cases, of the means that are necessary, and, in all, of power to render them effectual ; and when, in consequence, we feel that we cannot calculate on the course of events, and seem to be tossed about on the waves of a troublous and uncertain sea, surely it would be a consolation to know that infinite wisdom presides over all ; that to God nothing is uncertain or contingent, and that, whatever may be the result, nothing can happen by chance, but every thing will be ordered by One who cannot err. When, again, we feel that we are involved in an inextricable labyrinth of difficulties,—when the iron hand of necessity seems to crush us to the earth without leaving one hope of escape,—when all seems to be so inevitably fixed and certain, that our prospects on all hands are shut in with dark clouds, and we are brought to the very border of despair, surely it is consolatory to reflect, that it is not a blind or inexorable fate which oppresses us, but that all our present difficulties have been appointed by One who has power to relieve as well as to afflict us, and appointed, too, for reasons which are satisfactory to omniscient wisdom. And when, again, we contemplate the prevalence of suffering, and the apparently irregular distribution of good and evil in the present world ; when we see many in prosperity, while we are ourselves in trouble, and yet are at a loss to discover, in our blindness, the

reasons for which such unequal measures of prosperity are dealt out,—surely we may well allow the consideration of God's infinite rectitude to quiet our murmurings, and to allay the violence of our regret, especially when we are so ignorant both of our own character and of theirs, and so ill qualified to judge of the treatment which is best for us, and so well assured, that the principles of God's government shall not be fully developed, nor the whole results of his dealings with us ascertained, until this temporary scene of trial and discipline shall have passed away, and given place to that eternal state, in which the issues of time will be fully disclosed, and where “God shall be justified when he speaks, and clear when he gives his final judgment.”

MEDITATION II.

PS. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION :”

“*He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*”—

LAM. III. 33.

ON a general and comprehensive view of the structure of nature, and the course of providence, no man of ordinary candour will fail to acknowledge, that we live under the government of a Being essentially wise and just ; and that the moral faculties with which he has endowed his creatures, and the many sources of gratification which he has opened for their enjoyment, can only be ascribed to a principle in the divine mind, which approves of what is morally good, and delights in the diffusion of happiness.

Yet, notwithstanding the many proofs which nature furnishes of the rectitude and benevolence of the Great Author of our being, it cannot be denied, that *suffering*, to a very great extent, exists in this part of his dominions. When we reflect on the convulsions of nature, by which whole cities have been engulfed in a common ruin ; on the vicissitudes of the seasons,

by which famine and pestilence have been sent forth to slay their thousands and tens of thousands ; on the existence of numerous diseases, which are secretly undermining the health of some, and will ultimately terminate the lives of all ; on the mass of suffering which exists in the various asylums to which the poor, the diseased, or the insane, are carried from every corner of the land ; on the numerous chambers where private families are called to wait on the slow progress of decay, or the violent paroxysms of fever, or where the poor paralytic, half living, half dead, drags on the weary hours of an ambiguous existence ; on the numerous families pining under the iron hand of poverty, or more dreadful still, rent by the evil passions and loose propensities of one or more of their members ; on the disasters which bankruptcy occasions, when families, accustomed to the comforts and conveniencies of life, are reduced to the necessity of abandoning all their former habits and their fondest hopes, and of betaking themselves, if fit for the task, to daily toil,—if unfit, to humiliating dependence ; on the truly commiserable case of widows and orphans, deprived of their natural protectors and guardians, and thrown on the cold charities of the world ; and finally, on the vast charnel-house of death, where all the friends we once loved, and all the worth we once revered, and all the hopes we once cherished, lie buried in deep forgetfulness ;—oh ! when we reflect on these varied scenes of humiliation and sorrow, who that has a human heart can fail to weep over the afflictions of human life, or to feel that

the wisdom and benevolence of God being certain, there must be some *profound reason* for such painful providences as these?

Again, notwithstanding the many proofs which the moral constitution of our own being and the course of providence present, of the rectitude and holiness of the Governor of the world, it cannot escape the observation even of the most superficial inquirer, that here the measures of outward prosperity and adversity are by no means dealt out according to the comparative deserts of men; that many whose conduct has best attested the excellence of their character, are in deep trouble, while others, who neither practise nor profess religion, live in unbounded prosperity; that the pure and upright are not unfrequently immersed in poverty, while the profligate are surrounded with wealth; that the good often groan under the oppression of the wicked, to whom power is given over their fellow-men; and that the whole world presents a different aspect from what the innate dictates of our moral nature would lead us to expect, were this a state of retribution under the government of a righteous judge.

One of the most solemnly interesting inquiries to which the thoughts of a reflecting mind can be directed is,—To what cause are we to attribute the prevalence and the unequal distribution of affliction in the present state? And the solution of this question will lead to another of equal importance and interest, viz., How far these afflictions should affect our confidence in God, or our future hopes under his government?

In reference to the first of these questions, viz., To what cause we are to attribute the prevalence and the unequal distribution of affliction in the present state,—both reason and Scripture concur in ascribing every affliction with which men are visited, to the *purpose* and *providence* of God. Suffering does not arise fortuitously in his dominions, but is the product of his deliberate counsel, and the result of laws which he has established for the government of his subjects. It is neither a necessary adjunct, nor a casual accident of our nature ; not necessary, for omniscient wisdom and almighty power might constitute even a created being without suffering,—such are now the angels in heaven, and such was man before the Fall ; nor accidental, for that were to exempt the happiness of his creatures from God's control, and virtually to set aside his overruling providence. It is true, that suffering sometimes proceeds so immediately and so manifestly from the conduct of individual men, that to their follies or vices it may be ascribed as its proximate cause,—the horrors of disease being the natural fruit of profligate manners, and the hardships of poverty resulting naturally from habits of indolent indulgence, or improvident thoughtlessness. But even in such cases, these afflictive results are determined by a law which God has established,—a law which attaches health and comfort to frugal and temperate habits, and entails disease and penury on the opposite vices ; and God being the author of that constitution of things under which we live, to his sovereign will we must look as the ultimate cause of such

a connection betwixt sin and its appropriate misery. And, in other cases, as in the dread visitation of famine, or pestilence, or the more ordinary occurrence of family bereavement, we see his hand, as it were, visibly stretched forth: "Is there evil in a city," saith the sacred writer, "and the Lord hath not done it?" "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." It was the Lord who rained fire and brimstone out of heaven on the cities of the plain; it was the Lord who sent the deluge on the earth, until all men and every living thing died; it was the Lord who glorified himself in the destruction of the Egyptian host; and he still guards us against the foolish notion that the sufferings of life are fortuitous or accidental, lest we should thereby be led to overlook his hand in them, and so "to despise the chastening of the Lord."

Every affliction, then, with which any of us is visited, is the result of God's deliberate purpose, and no evil befalls us without his permission or appointment. Nor are our afflictions to be regarded as the results of the careless or capricious exercise of almighty power; but, on the contrary, they are to be ascribed to the most comprehensive wisdom, acting according to principles which are fixed and determined as laws of the divine government. God is not a careless or inattentive spectator of what passes amongst his subjects; he does not send evil amongst them at random, nor without cause, nor without a well-defined end in view: such capricious exercise of almighty power is incom-

patible with the possession of omniscient wisdom; and as his attributes forbid, so no exigency in his government can ever require it. He cannot be taken by surprise, neither can he act from the impulse of momentary feeling: every attribute of his nature, and every principle of his government, are alike stable and excellent; and from these, not from caprice or passion, does affliction spring. Far less can affliction be ascribed to the deliberate exercise of cruelty, or the sudden gust of revenge. If the comprehensive wisdom, the almighty power, and the perfect independence of God, forbid us to imagine that he can, in any case, permit evil to arise through negligence or caprice, surely the infinite benevolence which prompted him to communicate being to his creatures, and to open up for them so many sources of enjoyment, may well forbid the thought that he is capable of cherishing one vindictive feeling, or of taking delight in the infliction of suffering. Infinitely great, and glorious, and happy in himself, what possible motive can exist in the divine mind for the exercise of these cruel and vengeful passions, which he has forbidden his own creatures to cherish, and by which, where they are indulged, his creatures are debased? Shall we attribute to the most glorious Being in the universe those passions by which only the basest of mankind are animated, and which, wherever they exist, render the character hateful, and the bosom which contains them wretched as well as guilty? God forbid: all nature bears witness to the benevolence of its author; and that benevolence assures

us, that whatever evils may exist under his government, they are not inflicted in the exercise of cruelty, or for the gratification of passion,—that to whatever other cause they may be ascribed, they cannot be referred to any disposition on the part of God, that would lead him unnecessarily to make his creatures unhappy, or to take pleasure in their suffering. And, in addition to the testimony of nature, God does most solemnly disclaim every such feeling, and assures us, “that he afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men.”

In these words, it is not denied that affliction proceeds from the hand of God; on the contrary, it is admitted that *he does* afflict and grieve the children of men: but then, in regard to the disposition and feelings with which he does so, it is affirmed that he “afflicteth *not willingly*.” This cannot be understood to signify that affliction comes without the will, or contrary to the purpose of God, or that he does not approve of the painful discipline to which his people are subjected. On the contrary, every suffering which he inflicts is the fruit of his deliberate wisdom, and the object of his holy approbation. But when it is said that he “afflicteth *not willingly*,” we are given to understand that he has no pleasure in the misery of his creatures, considered in itself, and apart from its causes and ends; that he does not lift the rod merely to render them unhappy, and far less to gratify his own passion; that, but for moral considerations, physical happiness is with him a far more pleasing thing than physical suffering; and that, while he has no pleasure

in making his subjects wretched, he does delight in their comfort and wellbeing. This view, indeed, of the feelings with which God contemplates the sufferings of his creatures, necessarily arises out of the simplest idea which we can form of his character, as a perfectly wise and good Being ; and to what cause, then, it may be asked, are we to ascribe the sufferings which do actually prevail under his administration ? The Bible enables us fully to answer this question, by the views which it presents of God's character, as the Governor of the world ; and of the present state, as one of respite and trial.

God is revealed, not only as a being of infinite moral perfection and blessedness, but as the righteous *moral governor* of his intelligent creatures ; and the course of his providence is represented as not only comprehending the means by which he preserves them in existence, but also as constituting the discipline by which the ends of his moral government are fulfilled. To the idea of a moral government a law of some kind is absolutely essential, and a law of any kind being given, it was necessary that it should be accompanied with such sanctions of reward and punishment, as might put a difference betwixt the obedient and disobedient subjects of it. Hence, if by any means sin should appear, God determined that suffering should arise along with it ; and in the very structure of our own being, he has instituted physical checks as well as moral restraints to disobedience, and has connected therewith not only the pangs of an accusing conscience, but also a numerous

train of diseases, and the sentence of death. These arrangements, by which suffering is inseparably connected with sin, are far from being arbitrary; they flow necessarily from the perfections of the divine nature. Could we, indeed, entertain, for one instant, the monstrous idea, that God, although possessed of infinite power, and wisdom, and benevolence, was, nevertheless, in moral respects, a being of a neutral character,—that he had no holiness, no rectitude, no justice,—that he had no predilection for one style of moral character in his subjects, more than another,—that ingratitude, and sensuality, and deceit, were not more offensive to him than the opposite virtues,—then, and then only, could we conceive of him lavishing the wealth of almighty power and unbounded beneficence on all his creatures alike, and making no difference betwixt seraphic virtue and satanic guilt; but, being holy and just, as well as good, he must necessarily approve of what is congenial to his own character, and conformable to that law which is but the transcript of his character, and the expression of his unchangeable will. Although, therefore, from the benevolence of his nature, he must delight in the diffusion of happiness, yet, from the holiness and rectitude of his character, the principle, that sin should be connected with suffering, must be the object of his moral approbation.

Farther, men are not only represented in Scripture as the subjects of a moral government, but as subjects placed in a very peculiar and interesting state, a state of acknowledged guilt, yet of delayed punishment, in

order to their *probation and trial* for an everlasting destiny hereafter. Their present state is not one of "retribution, but of respite," *—sentence has been passed against them as guilty, but the effect of that sentence has been for a time suspended, in order to the application of means, on the part of God, for their redemption ; and being neither like the angels, perfectly holy and happy, nor like devils, absolutely lost, they occupy a middle state, which may be either the scene of their education for heaven, or of their preparation for hell. To one or other of these departments of the invisible world, all will ere long be transferred ; but, meanwhile, they are dealt with as creatures that have incurred condemnation, but who, through the mercy of God, are capable of rising to glory.

These two views, the one of God's character, as a moral governor and judge, and the other of mankind, as sinners in a state of respite and trial, satisfactorily account both for the sufferings which men endure, and for the unequal distribution of them. Were there no sin, there would be no suffering ; or were this the place of strict retribution, suffering would be awarded according to the amount of guilt ; but it being a middle state, enjoyment and sorrow are so intermingled as to prove, at once, the benevolence and the rectitude of God. To the great moral ends of this economy, the discipline of affliction is, in many respects, needful ; and hence the varied evils with which God has seen meet to visit us. Of these afflictions, viewed as parts

* DR GORDON.

of his own procedure, and a means of salutary discipline, God must be supposed to entertain a holy moral approbation ; and yet, in none of his dispensations, however dark and distressing, does he take pleasure in inflicting unnecessary suffering, or in making his creatures unhappy ; for it is expressly declared, that “he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner,” and that “he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.”

These views throw an interesting light, both on the character of God, and on the nature and design of affliction under his government. As God is to be regarded both as an affectionate father and a righteous judge, so affliction is presented in two lights in Scripture, in each of which, it is compatible with the most perfect benevolence in the divine mind. It is there represented as being partly *corrective* and partly *penal* ; at one time, the chastisement of an affectionate father ; at another, the award of a righteous judge ; while, in both, it is declared to be the result of sin. In neither case is it the spontaneous infliction of one who delights in suffering for its own sake, but the result of principles from which no wise father or judge will ever depart in the management of his children or subjects.

The meaning of the declaration, that “God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men,” may, perhaps, be best illustrated, if, conceiving of him as the father and governor of his rational creatures, we take, as an illustration, the parallel case of an affectionate father, or a benevolent judge among ourselves.

Take the case of an earthly parent: suppose him to be endowed with all the tenderest sensibilities of nature,—conceive of him as delighting in the health and welfare of his children, and, in the exercise of every benevolent affection, lavishing on them all the riches of a father's kindness and a father's care. You say, on looking at his benignant countenance and his smiling family, this is an affectionate father. But a secret canker of ingratitude seizes one or more of his children,—they shun his presence, or dislike his society, and at length venture on acts of positive disobedience; he warns them, he expostulates with them, but in vain, they revolt more and more; and at length, in the exercise of deliberate thought, he lifts the rod and chastens them; and he who once was the author of all their happiness, has become also their calm but firm reprover. And who that knows the tenderness of a father's heart, will not acknowledge, that severe as may be the suffering inflicted, such a man doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of his love?

Again, conceive of a man of benevolent feelings invested with the office of magistrate or judge,—conceive of Howard, the unwearied friend of his race, who visited the prisons of Europe to alleviate the miseries of the worst and most destitute of men,—conceive of such a man sitting in judgment over the life or liberty of another; and can you not suppose that, while every feeling within him inclined him to the side of mercy, and his every sensibility would be gratified, were it possible to make the felon virtuous and happy,

he might, notwithstanding, have such a deep moral persuasion of the importance of virtue and order to the wellbeing of the State, that he could consign the prisoner to a dungeon or the gallows, and that, too, with the perfect conviction that it was right and good to do so; while, still, every sentiment of the heart within him, if it could be disclosed, would bear witness that he afflicted not willingly, and that he had no pleasure in the death of the criminal?

Such a father and such a judge is God; and the sufferings which he inflicts, whether they be viewed as corrective or penal, are compatible with the loftiest benevolence in the divine mind. And, unquestionably, the fact, that "God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," may, in one light, be regarded as a *ground of consolation*, inasmuch as it assures us that the Almighty Being, in whose hands our destinies are placed, has no pleasure in the mere infliction of suffering,—that, in his holy mind, not one passion exists which can be gratified by it,—and that, even "as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."

We confine our present meditation to the mere *negative view* of affliction, that it is not the result of a capricious or cruel delight in suffering on the part of God: hereafter we shall see abundant reason to believe that it is, under a system of grace, the result of pure and comprehensive benevolence, and the means of much *positive good*. In the meanwhile, let us not allow even the darkest aspects of God's providence to shake

our faith in the benevolence of his character ; and when, through the sharp inflictions of his rod, we are tempted to entertain hard thoughts of Him, let us remember the precious truth, that “ God afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men.”

f But while these views are, in some respects, highly consolatory, inasmuch as they assure us of the benevolence of God, yet, to every reflecting mind, another question will suggest itself, to which, without such a revelation as is contained in the Gospel, no satisfactory answer can, in our opinion, be returned. The benevolence of God being admitted, the question arises, How far the afflictions which do prevail, notwithstanding, should affect our hopes of future happiness under His government ? To those who rest their hopes of exemption from future punishment on the mere general benevolence of God, this should be a very serious and solemn inquiry ; for God is, at this moment, a Being of infinite benevolence, and yet, suffering to a great extent prevails in his empire ; and the question may well be entertained, whether, being afflicted now under his administration, we may not, *for the same reasons*, be equally or still more afflicted *hereafter* ? And this inquiry becomes the more serious, when we connect affliction with the causes to which it is ascribed. What are these causes ? why, they are the sins with which we are chargeable on the one hand, and the holiness and justice of God’s character on the other. But an effect can only be prevented by the removal of its cause ; and is it not a very solemn reflection, that the

holiness and justice of God are unchangeable attributes of his nature ; and that, if we continue to be chargeable with sin, they must, for aught we know, perpetuate our sufferings ? So far from allaying our apprehensions from this cause, the fact that God “ afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men,” gives a very awful sanction to the moral principles of his government, when, notwithstanding his benevolence, he does visit his creatures with severe calamity. The benevolence of God being admitted, the whole course of his providence may be regarded as a very solemn exhibition of the holiness and justice of the divine government. And unless, in these circumstances, we can discover some way of escaping from guilt, or can entertain the delusive hope, that God’s holy and righteous government is to be radically changed, we cannot fail to have many dark thoughts, and many anxious fears, respecting our future prospects. We see that God is wise, and righteous, and benevolent, and yet notwithstanding, or rather for that very reason, we feel that God is pouring many a bitter ingredient into our cup,—that he is visiting us with trials of a very severe and confounding nature ; and can we help inquiring whether it will be so for ever ? whether this life is to be the pattern of our immortal existence ? or whether, in the eternity which awaits us, we have reason to expect either the unmingled good, or the unmingled evil which are combined, at present, in the chequered scene of life ? We want some assurance, on this point, to remove our doubts, and misgivings, and fears ; and, without such

assurance, we feel that our eternal prospects are dark and uncertain indeed.

These misgivings are not without a foundation in reason ; for manifold as are the proofs which our own experience supplies of the benevolent character of God, and explicit as is the sanction which Scripture gives to the indications of nature, there are many things, notwithstanding, both in nature and in Scripture, which are fitted to awaken alarm respecting the relation in which we stand to that august Being, and the mode in which he may yet deal with us here and hereafter. God may be perfectly wise, and just, and good ; yet, conceiving of him as the moral Governor and Judge of mankind, we cannot fail to understand that he must put a difference betwixt the righteous and the wicked, —that his administration may require the sanction of punishment, and that the very perfection of his character may thus become the strongest reason for the infliction of suffering, where his law has been dishonoured, and his authority contemned. The infinite power, and rectitude, and wisdom of God, which, to innocent beings, must be a source of the highest and purest delight, may thus become, to fallen creatures, the occasion of alarm, and suspicion, and jealousy ; and a secret distrust of *their* interest in his favour will prey upon their minds, even in the midst of all the riches of his benevolence which nature displays.

Accordingly, may I not appeal to every human being, whether he has not felt in his own bosom many a secret misgiving respecting his personal interest in the favour

of his Judge, and many a dark foreboding in respect to his future prospects, and that, too, while he could not shut his eyes to the evidence, nor bring himself to deny the reality of God's wisdom, and rectitude, and love? The reason is, that every man knows and feels that he is guilty; that he has violated the law, and forsaken the service of God; and that God, being a righteous governor, may, notwithstanding his benevolence, be disposed to punish transgressors. Conscience makes this suggestion, and the course of God's providence confirms it; else, why so much suffering, if a benevolent God entertains no hatred against sin? The feelings of our own minds must convince us, that the present course of God's providence is utterly irreconcilable with the idea, either of his wisdom or benevolence, unless, in our own conduct, he finds a holy reason for his method of dealing with us; and no conscience can be so blinded as not to perceive much in the state and conduct of every man, that may warrant a Holy God in inflicting suffering and death.

The Bible does unquestionably, in the first instance, confirm the testimony of nature and conscience in respect to the present state of trial. It acknowledges the existence of sorrow and suffering, under the government of a most wise and benevolent God; it declares that, notwithstanding the moral faculties which God hath given to us, and the moral indications which the course of providence affords, good and evil are not here dealt out according to the strict measure of desert; and the reason which it assigns for the sufferings that

prevail in the world, is the prevalence of sin, while it attributes the regular distribution of good and evil, to the nature of the present state, as one of respite and trial for an eternal state after death. Had its communications stopped at this point, it would have *confirmed our worst fears*, and deepened our most distressing thoughts ; for, when revealing, as it does, the benevolence of God, it declares notwithstanding, that even under his government, sin must be connected with suffering ; and when it points to an eternal state, where the principles of his holy and righteous administration shall have their ultimate issue, and be more fully unfolded, how could we avoid the apprehension that we are obnoxious to the displeasure of our Almighty Judge, and in danger of an eternal state of retribution from his righteous hand ? So far from allaying these apprehensions, in the first instance, or declaring them to be unreasonable in themselves, or inconsistent with our just deserts, it is one leading object of the Bible to confirm their certainty, to impress their truth on the heart, and to assure us that judgments, infinitely more awful than those which prevail in the present world, await the transgressors of the Divine law, in a future state of strict judicial retribution. The Bible sanctions all the judgments which conscience has ever pronounced against us ; it delineates our characters in the darkest shades of guilt ; and it affirms that, notwithstanding the benevolence of God, sin cannot escape punishment, without inferring a violation of those eternal principles on which the government of the universe is conducted,

and on the maintenance of which, the glory of God, and the happiness of his obedient creatures depend.

Are any who now meditate on this serious subject along with me ready to exclaim, How, then, can the Bible be our comfort in affliction—the Bible, which presents a more humiliating view of our character, and a more distressing view of our state, and a more alarming view of our everlasting prospects, than what is contained in any other book, or what has been suggested from any other quarter, or what, fearful and desponding as we are, we have ever been willing to entertain? Ah! brethren, you see how true it is, that the Bible does not seek to comfort you by denying the evils of your condition, or by withdrawing your attention from them, or by soothing you with partial views of their extent, or delusive expectations of their removal. It probes your case to the very bottom. It unfolds all the evil that is within, or around, or before you. And this it does, not only from a regard to truth, which, however dark and distressing, cannot be compromised in any communication from God to his creatures, but also, and especially, with a view to shatter your confidence in every spring of spurious comfort, and every false ground of hope, and to lead you in simplicity to a ground of consolation, which alone can cheer your hearts amidst your present sorrows, and support your spirits in the prospect of what is yet before you; and which, bearing, as it does, the impress of God's hand, shall endure, when all other confidences are shattered, and all other hopes destroyed.

I have adverted to the difficulties in which our relation to God, and our prospects under his government, are involved, because they shut us all up *to the doctrine of the cross*, and because they will lead us to the only source of sound and abiding consolation—the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. We shall find that every such difficulty evanishes, every doubt is repressed, and every fear destroyed, when that love is apprehended and believed ; but, meantime, hesitate not, I beseech you, to receive the testimony of God respecting your state, and character, and prospects, and turn not away in disgust, because, in the light of Scripture, they seem dark and appalling. True, they *are* dark and appalling indeed ; but is it not your interest to know the real state of the case ? Is it possible that God can err in the estimate which he forms of your character, or deceive you as to the fate which, under his own government, awaits unforgiven guilt ? From whom, if not from God, can you expect to have such information as shall render your present and future condition, and his plans and intentions with regard to you, intelligible and certain ? And although you must feel the statements of Scripture respecting your guilt and your deserts to be humiliating and painful in the extreme, yet does not your own observation, so far as it extends, concur with the testimony of Scripture, in regard to the present state ; and do not your own consciences suggest many anxious forebodings respecting the future, the same in kind with those which the Bible sanctions and certifies ? Are you not,

at the very best, uncertain of future happiness? Are you not, more frequently still, oppressed by the thought, that the future may be not less, and perhaps more, distressing than the present? Does not conscience plainly intimate, that, under the government of a righteous Being, you have no reason to expect any mark of his favour, and much to anticipate his disapprobation and wrath? And when the Bible makes these convictions sure; when it seals them with the authority of that God who cannot err, and unfolds the views with which he regards, and the punishment with which he will visit, impenitent guilt, oh! it is surely your highest wisdom to listen patiently, and to inquire earnestly, whether, after all, there may not be some way of escape from a state which you feel to be one of dreadful uncertainty, and from a prospect which conscience has surrounded with terrors?

There is one such way of escape, and only one.

The *Scheme of Redemption* is the grand peculiarity of the Bible. It is there set forth as a prominent feature in God's moral government,—as a plan, with reference to which, this world was at first created, and has since been sustained, and many things permitted to occur in it, which, under a system of immediate retribution, could not have been allowed to happen, or to continue; and it is uniformly represented as the grand means by which God's character was to be fully disclosed, not only to men, but to all his intelligent creatures. This scheme will be found to illustrate or

explain whatever is dark or intricate in the arrangements of providence. It establishes the principles on which his moral government is founded, while it explains the reasons why these principles are not fully developed in the present state. And, above all, it unfolds to man a view of God's dispositions towards him, and a prospect of his own future destiny, which are alike fitted to awaken his profoundest admiration, and his deepest gratitude, and to silence every complaint, and solace every sorrow which the present aspect of providence might otherwise awaken.

MEDITATION III.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION:”

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but might have eternal life.”—JOHN III. 16.

WE learn from the chequered scene of human life, not less than from the plain testimony of Scripture, that there are two principles in the divine character; the one, the principle of love, which delights in the diffusion of happiness, and is averse from the infliction of misery; the other, the principle of holiness and rectitude, which must invariably connect suffering with sin. We see, in the present state, the operation of both principles, in the blended enjoyments and sorrows of human life; and the grand problem is, whether, as in the present state, God's holiness and justice must *for ever* entail suffering on his disobedient subjects; or, whether his love may not devise a remedy for existing evils, so as to render it compatible with the moral interests of his government to exempt them from punishment, and receive them into his favour?

We cannot venture to state the problem, so as even to imply the possibility of his abolishing suffering while sin continues, or of his love being exercised to the effect of rendering his creatures happy, without regard being had to the interests of holiness and justice. We dare not ask, whether God's love may not triumph over his rectitude; or, whether his benevolent delight in happiness may not be greater than his holy aversion to sin? nor, could we entertain such a question, would we wish to solve it in the affirmative, for that were to loose the bonds of his government,—to reverse the whole principles and methods of his present administration,—to subvert the moral constitution of our own being,—to array one attribute of God's character against another, and thus to annihilate every ground of rational confidence, and to introduce universal uncertainty in respect to his government. The present state affords no evidence of such opposition betwixt the benevolence and the holiness of the divine character, and far less of any likelihood that his benevolence will triumph over his holiness. Both are seen to be in operation; and the many proofs of his benevolence with which we are surrounded, so far from assuring us of future exemption from suffering, serve only to augment our anxiety on the subject; for, as suffering to a great extent exists under his government now, notwithstanding his benevolence, the question arises with tenfold interest, may not the same, or still greater sufferings, be awarded for the same reasons hereafter?

With the Bible in our hands, no doubt or difficulty on this momentous subject remains ; for, while it confirms and illustrates the testimony which his own providence bears to the holiness and rectitude of the divine character, it reveals a scheme of redemption, in which “truth meets with mercy, and righteousness with peace,” and by which God can be “faithful and just in forgiving sin ;” the “Just God,” and yet “the Saviour of the guilty ;” “just even while he justifies the ungodly.” In this stupendous scheme, we know not whether most to admire the awful holiness, or the marvellous love which it displays, or the profound wisdom by which both are combined, so as mutually to establish and illustrate each other. For what can be said either of the holiness, or of the love of God, by men—nay, by angels and seraphs—who have beheld them burning bright in the upper sanctuary, and adored them uninterruptedly, in their full measure, in the presence of God himself ; nay, though all parts of God’s universe should concert together, and all intelligent spirits unite in gathering the proofs which nature furnishes, and combining the separate testimonies of all worlds to the holiness and goodness of God, what could be said of either that would outweigh or bear comparison with the import of that single statement,—*“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but might have eternal life !”*

God loved the world : from the spontaneous love of God the plan of our salvation proceeded, that being

the source of every blessing which this salvation includes, and of every hope which it warrants or inspires.

Let us meditate on the nature of this love. It is not the mere general benevolence which delights in the diffusion of happiness among the obedient subjects of the divine government, nor is it the mere sentiment of compassion with which a benevolent being may be supposed to regard the misery of his apostate creatures, and which might lead him to pity their case, even while he punished their guilt. It is not a mere passive emotion in the divine mind, but an active and operative love, which prompts the purpose, and forms the plan of relieving them. It is the attribute of *mercy*—mercy that not only relieves the wretchedness, but pardons the guilt of its objects, and which allows not even the most aggravated sinfulness to be a bar to the communication of its blessings. Of this attribute heaven itself affords no exemplification, for there no sin has ever been forgiven; and this world is the theatre which God has selected for the manifestation of the glory of his character, as “the Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin.”

And in what circumstances was this love displayed? When the world was in a state of rebellion against him,—when the human character had been totally changed from its pristine innocence, and had become the very reverse of his own,—when, instead of being the object of men’s supreme reverence and affection, he was the object of their enmity and dread,—when the

holy attributes of his nature, and the moral principles of his government, and the righteous precepts of his law were all alike distasteful to their depraved minds,—when his sole prerogative, as the Governor and Judge of the world, had been carelessly forgotten, or daringly denied,—when the sublime temple of nature, at whose altar they should have worshipped the one living and true God, was filled with the shrines of idolatry, where his supremacy was virtually denied, or divided amongst a multitude of false gods,—and when the more sacred temple of the human heart, where God desired to dwell, and to be ministered unto by a train of holy affections, had become a chamber of imagery, filled with a host of wicked passions—a temple, indeed, of spiritual idolatry, where the best of all homage, that of man's affections, was rendered, if not to idols of gold and silver, yet to the wealth, and honours, and pleasures of the world,—when, in one word, God's character was hated by man, and man's character odious to God,—yet, even then, “GOD LOVED THE WORLD.” Not surely because he could regard the character of men with complacency—far less because their conduct had deserved his favour, for their character was regarded by him with utter abhorrence, and their conduct had exposed them to his righteous judgment. But while he hated and condemned their sin, no malice mingled with that hatred, no revenge dictated that condemnation; on the contrary, he pitied their case, even while he abhorred their guilt, and, in the exercise of a free, generous, and sovereign love, he resolved to seek and to save that which was lost.”

And what was the measure of that love which he felt, and which the scheme of redemption unfolds? What man, what angel, what seraph, will undertake to measure it, when this one clause is added, "God *so* loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son!" To comprehend the full import of such words, we must be able to enter into those feelings of ineffable love with which the Father regards his only begotten Son,—a Son, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory with himself, and possessing, along with the divine attributes of almighty power and omniscient wisdom, a character in all respects the same as his own—a character of unspotted holiness, and infinite benevolence and love,—a Son, too, held in honour and high estimation in heaven, where angels and seraphim adored him as their Creator and Lord, and who, from the beginning, was "his delight, rejoicing always before him." Mysterious and incomprehensible as, to our limited capacity, many parts of this sublime subject may appear, we cannot fail, at least, to be convinced, that no form of words could possibly express a greater amount of love than the simple statement, that "God *so* loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son."

This love will be still farther enhanced in our estimation, if we consider the benevolent design of God in giving his Son, and the beneficial results of that gift to his believing people. It was that they "*who believe might not perish.*" In common with the rest of mankind, they were in danger of perishing. They had already within them the seeds of perdition, and the

sentence of death stood recorded against them. They were enemies to God in their hearts, and their enmity was manifested by the frequent transgression of his law, and a constant estrangement of affection from his character and service. And, as immortal creatures, destined to live for ever, and about to enter, in a very short period, on a state of righteous retribution, they had no solid ground of hope that their eternity would be a happy one ; but, on the contrary, had reason to fear, that there lay before them an everlasting state of guilt, debasement, and despair. It was God's design in sending his Son to deliver them out of that estate of guilt and danger, to open up a way of escape, and to rescue them, by the operation of his grace, from the power of those evil passions, which, had they been perpetuated, would necessarily have issued in the miseries of hell. And when we consider the odious nature and debasing tendency of sin, and the amount and duration of that punishment which God has denounced against it, oh ! how grateful should we be for the least intimation of God's willingness to save us from it,—and how much more grateful, when we are assured that our deliverance from it is one of the objects which God has most at heart. For, can we suppose that he takes pleasure in the death and destruction even of the guilty, when we are assured that “he gave his only begotten Son, that we might not perish.”

The magnitude of the danger to which we were exposed, and the awful nature of the punishment which awaited us, may well awaken our profoundest admira-

tion of that love which has opened up a way of escape. But even this is not all. God's love is not exhausted, nor his benevolent design completed, by redeeming his people from guilt and suffering. It points to a higher end, even their exaltation to a state of perfect blessedness—that they “might have eternal life.” The Gospel of Christ not only states the consoling fact, that “there is forgiveness with God,” and that “he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner :” it conveys also the cheering intelligence of an endless life beyond the grave—a state not only of conscious existence, but of perfect uninterrupted and endless felicity—provided and secured by the mediation of Christ, for every one that believeth on his name. Their preparation for this glorious state was one of the objects of the Saviour's mission, and, by his grace, a new spiritual life is awakened within them which shall never die, but which shall grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength, until it issue in life eternal. It declares that our present life is but as it were the period of nonage, during which we are to prepare for entering on the full privileges of children in our father's house, and on the enjoyment of that rich inheritance which belongs to them in heaven ;—that death, so far from annihilating the immortal spirit, or impairing its energies, or introducing it into a dark and troubled scene of doubt, or despair, or punishment, is, in the case of every believer, the birthday of the soul, when, being released from the body, it is born into immortality, and placed at once in the presence of God and his angels. And in order to fit us for a prospect so

lofty and boundless, Christ has declared it to be the grand end of his mission, to raise human nature out of the debasement into which it has fallen,—to purify, and elevate, and refine its noble faculties,—to restore man not only to the friendship, but also to the likeness of God, in whose image he was created,—to cleanse him from the pollution of a world that lieth in wickedness, and so to present him faultless and blameless before the presence of God. This he does by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and by means of the truths contained in his Word ; and in the new spiritual life thus communicated, every believer has within him the germ of life eternal—the first dawn of that glorious light in which he is to live and have his being for ever—the commencement of that course of progressive improvement and happiness, which shall have no interruption and no end, and which death, so far from disturbing, shall serve to advance, by placing him in circumstances where the highest exercise of his faculties, and the largest acquisitions of knowledge, shall be combined with enjoyment of the purest happiness, and the noblest society in the universe.

Considering the capacities of man, may we not ask, with becoming reverence, what higher proof could God himself have furnished of his love ? If it was an act of great benevolence on the part of God, that he communicated existence at all, even for an hour to the insect, or for a few years to man upon the earth, how much more that he made man immortal ? If we adore his benevolence in providing a liberal supply for

the physical wants of his creatures, how much more should we admire his goodness, when the wants of our rational and immortal nature are the objects of his regard? If exemption from calamity, so long as we live on the earth, be a ground of gratitude, how much more the exemption of the soul from the burden of guilt, and the danger of punishment, its promised deliverance from the whole host of evil passions, and the numerous sufferings which follow in their train? And, above all, if the prospect of health or preferment in this world should make us thankful, how much more that boundless prospect of eternal life, wherein our faculties shall be for ever improving, and our happiness, nay, our very capacities of happiness, increasing for ever; and what shall we say more? that God was so resolved on this, that, when nothing else could secure it, "he gave up his only begotten Son."

It may be asked, Why did God give up his only begotten Son? What necessity existed for so costly a sacrifice? Might not the mere intimation of his kind intentions towards us, conveyed through one of his commissioned servants, have served to remove our fears, and to establish for us a ground of hope? Had God been a being of mere compassion, and had we been regarded in no other light than as the objects of his pity, this course might perhaps have been adopted, although we should thus have been deprived of the noblest proof of the strength and ardour of that affection which burned in the divine mind towards us. But, besides being a God of mercy, he is also the moral

governor and judge of men ; and, besides being the objects of his pity, we were the responsible subjects of his government, and amenable to punishment for our crimes. As his moral government was to continue for ever, and as, wherever it extends throughout the universe, it is based on the principles of rectitude and retribution, it was necessary to guard against any dishonour being put on that law, which is a transcript of his own holy character, and the rule of his universal and eternal jurisprudence. Hence God would not cancel its threatenings, nor relax its authority, nor mitigate its requirements even *when he had formed the purpose of saving the sinful* ; but, on the contrary, made the manifestation of his forgiving mercy the occasion of a brighter display of the holiness and justice both of his character and law. For this purpose, he entered into a covenant with his only begotten Son—choosing him as the substitute of the guilty, whom he designed to save ; laying upon him the responsibility of their guilt, and exacting from him the penalty which they had incurred, and engaging, in return, to impute to them the merit of his sufferings and obedience, and to deal *with them* according to *his* deserts. And this was done, that while his forgiving mercy was manifested in giving up his Son, and, for his sake, receiving his people into favour, his equity might be displayed, and his law magnified and made honourable, by the vicarious sufferings and death of their surety. As no proof of his love could be greater than the act of giving up his Son, so surely, no proof of

his holiness and justice could be stronger than what arises from his *not sparing* that Son when he stood in the room of the guilty. What greater honour could, in the nature of things, be paid to the law, than what was implied in the voluntary submission of God's own Son to its demands? What a spectacle to men and angels! the Son of God submitting to that law in his own person, acknowledging the justice of its threatenings by enduring them, and the equity of its precepts by obeying them, and declaring his holy determination to uphold its authority, and to establish it for ever, even at the very time when his love prompted him to deliver his people from its condemning power! It was in this sense that God gave up his Son—he “gave him to be a *propitiation* for our sins.” It was to manifest “*grace reigning through righteousness* unto eternal life,” that Christ consented to become man; and it was “that God *might be just*, while He *justified* the ungodly,” that Christ was “wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities,” and that “He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

This glorious scheme, therefore, while it is pervaded by the golden principle of divine love, is yet founded on the principles of eternal justice. In it “truth met with mercy, and righteousness with peace,” and the full satisfaction which it provides for the claims of divine justice, may well serve to silence every doubt or misgiving which, notwithstanding the benevolence

of God, might be awakened in our minds, by a consideration of the holiness and justice of the divine administration.

Thus, both under the economy of providence, and under that of grace, the holiness and the love of God, so far from being inconsistent with, or opposed to one another, are, by an admirable arrangement of divine wisdom, made mutually to illustrate and enhance each other. Under the scheme of providence, there are many enjoyments which bespeak the love of God, and many sorrows which bespeak his justice; and every reflecting mind must feel, in looking on the chequered scene of life, that the greater God's love is, the more awful also is his justice; and the more awful his justice, the more wonderful his love,—since, notwithstanding the one, suffering prevails, and, notwithstanding the other, many blessings are bestowed. In like manner, in the cross, God's love appears in the gift of his only begotten Son; but his justice also in the awful death which the Saviour endured. And we feel that if God had not been gracious, we should have less revered the justice which demanded, and that, had he not been just, we should less have esteemed the love which prompted the sacrifice of his only Son.

The consolation which may be drawn *from the cross* is the only thorough remedy for sorrow, the only abiding antidote against despair. That consolation arises, partly, from the manifestation which is there made of God's disposition and character, as the Lord God

merciful and gracious ; and from which we may draw the precious assurance, that “ if God spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up to the death for us all, much more will he, with him also, freely give us all things.” It arises partly, also, from the assurance, that One has undertaken our cause, who is both able and willing to help us, and with whom the Father is ever well-pleased ; and, finally, from the fulness and completeness of that redemption which he has wrought out. This scheme of redemption is complete in all its parts, and adequate to the supply of all our wants. Being framed by the unerring wisdom of God, and sealed with the precious blood of his Son, and administered by the agency of his Holy Spirit, its efficiency is guaranteed by every attribute of the divine nature ; and while it throws an interesting light on the present scene, it is a system which stretches forward into eternity, and presents a remedy, not only for every present sorrow but also for every future fear. What sin is there which this redemption will not expiate ? what sorrow which this redemption cannot soothe ? what want which this redemption cannot supply ? what fear which it may not dispel ? what holy hope which it does not sanction ? what attribute of God which it does not illustrate ? what human exigency for which it does not provide ? It is consolatory, too, to know, that while this redemption is infinitely full, it is also *freely offered* to all ; and this is intimated in these words, which contain the very sum and substance of the Gospel,—“ *Whosoever* believeth in him shall not

perish." *Whosoever* : where, then, is the sinner that is excluded from this salvation? where the man who is not warranted to repose his confidence in the Saviour? "WHOSOEVER," be he rich or poor, young or old, prosperous or afflicted, learned or unlearned, yea, comparatively righteous or desperately wicked, still that word is enough for him : it holds out a warrant and an encouragement to the most abandoned and forlorn ; and this warrant is confirmed by the assurance, that "He came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance," and that *whosoever* "cometh unto him, will in no wise be cast out."

Glorious scheme ! well may the angels desire to look into it, and well may they hence derive an increase to their knowledge of the manifold wisdom of God ; and far more should *we* make it the theme of our profoundest meditation, and seek to comprehend and embrace it in all its fulness, since it is God's own plan for abolishing sin and its consequent evils ; a plan which, whether we view it in reference to the character of God which it unfolds, or in reference to the benefits which it confers on all who embrace it, will ever seem the more beneficent and wise, in proportion as our knowledge and experience of its provisions and practical effects are enlarged ; and which, to men, and angels, and seraphim, will be the theme of exhaustless meditation and praise, in that blessed world where its glorious issues will be unfolded, and its benefits fully enjoyed.

MEDITATION IV.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“ THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MY AFFLICTION: ”

“ *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* ”—

JOHN VI. 37.

WHEN a thoughtful mind, especially in the season of affliction, or in the prospect of death, considers its relation to God and its eternal prospects, it can hardly fail to be impressed with the transcendent importance of that question,—“ *What must I do to be saved ?* ” If the inquirer betake himself to the Bible, with the view of obtaining satisfactory information on this momentous subject, he finds God’s own answer to that question, in these memorable words,—“ *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.* ” These words are few and simple, but they contain the sum and substance of the Gospel message ; they teach him to believe the record which God hath given respecting his Son, and, believing that record, to place his personal trust and dependence on Christ, as an

all-sufficient Saviour, able to save *unto the uttermost* all that come unto God by him.

But when this plain and simple answer is given to his question, the anxious inquirer is apt to be staggered and perplexed by its very simplicity ; he is not prepared to find that every bar has been taken out of the way, and that he is at liberty to repair to Christ at once as his Saviour ; he is surprised, and begins to doubt whether he has understood the message in the sense in which God would have him to understand it ; he ponders on other passages of Scripture which declare God's wrath and curse on account of sin, or which require holiness of heart and life, or which speak of the difficulty of being saved ; and, without advertng to the fact that these passages refer to difficulties which arise out of his own fallen and depraved nature, and which God's grace alone can remove, he is apt to think that something must be done by him, before he is warranted to embrace the offer of the Gospel, or to trust in Christ as his Saviour. Hence, encouraged, on the one hand, by the possibility of his being saved, and distracted, on the other, by the supposed necessity of fulfilling certain conditions before he is warranted to take God's invitation to himself, he derives little or no immediate comfort from the simple message of the Gospel, and remains for a time at a distance from Christ, or only fearfully looking to him as one that may ultimately be his Saviour. To an inquirer in these circumstances, nothing can be more useful than to set before him a clear view of the

warrant of faith, or of the ground on which he is encouraged at once, and without any delay, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to come to him for pardon and peace.

I. The first ground on which the most disconsolate inquirer may be encouraged to return to God, through Christ, without delay, is the *character of God*, as it is *revealed* in his Word. That character is set forth in Scripture in a variety of aspects, which are all fitted to conciliate the love, and to secure the confidence of sinners. Let every serious inquirer consider the testimony of God in this matter :—"The Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with Moses there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, *The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands,*"—it follows, indeed, "that he will by no means clear the guilty ; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation." How far the last words of this sublime passage should affect the faith and hope of a sinner under the Christian dispensation, will be considered hereafter ; meanwhile, let us give due weight to the former part of the passage, in which God's love and mercy are declared with a fulness and variety of expression which leave no room for unbelieving doubt or suspicion. His very name is "*the Lord God merciful and gracious ;*" he is declared to be "*abundant*

in goodness;" he is said to be "*keeping mercy for thousands.*" Nor is this a solitary passage, different from the general tenor of God's Word: his character is delineated in the same way in so many places, that our chief difficulty consists in making a selection of the most striking and impressive proofs. We have taken one passage from the Law; let us look now to the Psalms:—"Thou, Lord, art *good*, and *ready to forgive*, and *plenteous in mercy* unto all them that call upon thee." "Thou, O Lord, art a God *full of compassion*, and *gracious*; long-suffering, and *plenteous in mercy and truth.*" "Thy mercy is *great* unto the heavens." "The Lord is good; his mercy is *everlasting.*" "*Great* are thy *tender* mercies, O Lord." "Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever." Passing from the Law and the Psalms, let us look now to the Prophets:—"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; he retaineth not his anger for ever, because *he delighteth in mercy.*" "Thou art a God, *ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.*" "Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the *multitude of his mercies.*" "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." If we look to the Evangelists, we see there recorded the words of Christ himself:—"God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." "And this is the will of him that sent me, that *every one* which

seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." And, finally, let us hear the testimony of the Apostles:—"God is *love*," says John; "God is *rich in mercy*," says Paul; "the Lord is *very pitiful* and of *tender mercy*," says James; "the Lord is long-suffering to us-ward," says Peter, "not willing that *any* should *perish*, but that all should come to repentance." Thus the unanimous testimony of the Law, the Psalms, the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Evangelists, and the Apostles of the New, bears witness to God's character, as a Being of manifold mercies, whose very name is *love*; and a clear apprehension and cordial belief of this great truth, would do much to remove all the scruples and fears which prevent many an anxious inquirer from coming to him for life and salvation. In general terms, we all admit, indeed, the merciful character of God; but surely, if it impart no comfort, and inspire no confidence, and awaken no gratitude, it must either be very imperfectly apprehended, or little, if at all, believed. The proper effect of such a character, when seen in all its glorious excellency, is to banish distrust and suspicion, and to awaken admiring love, and childlike confidence. The kindness or benignity of an earthly friend produces these feelings, and his very character is regarded as a sufficient warrant for our going to him in a time of straits, and frankly laying before him our difficulties and wants, in the assurance, that his kindness will prompt him to listen to our request, and to take an interest in our case. Why is it otherwise with us when God is con-

cerned, unless it be that we either do not sufficiently understand the benignity of his nature, or are suspicious of the sincerity of his kindness? Did we really believe God to be so very gracious and merciful a Being as his Word declares him to be; did we realize his infinite love, and were we assured that his love is perfectly sincere, oh! how would this banish the hard thoughts of him which we are too prone to cherish, and destroy those scruples, and misgivings, and fears, of which we are sensible when we think of repairing to him for mercy. The evil is, that even when the grace and mercy of God are not formally called in question, there often remains in the heart an undefined and vague suspicion of his sincerity, or an idea that his love is wavering and uncertain, if not capricious, in its exercise; and hence, all the cheering influence which the light of his love might exert upon us, is destroyed by the intervention of our own dark unbelief, just as the rays of the sun are intercepted, and their influence diminished, by the dense vapours and thick clouds of the sky.

Grace and mercy, indeed, are not the sole attributes of God; and the sinner who would fondly cling to these, may be repelled by the reflection that, merciful as God is, he is also holy and just; that he is declared, both by the voice of conscience, and by his own revealed Word, to be the avenger of sin, and that, as such, he cannot be regarded by any sinner without alarm and terror. All this is true; and were it overlooked or forgotten, we should entertain a very partial and delusive idea of the divine character. It is equally

true that unassisted reason can discover no method of reconciling the exercise of mercy with the claims of justice, and no ground of confidence in God, such as would warrant the hope of safety for a sinner. But in God's *revealed character*, justice and mercy meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other; we are under no necessity of forgetting any attribute of his nature, or of adopting a partial view of his character, for the sake of deriving peace and comfort from it; we can regard it in all its holiness, and yet feel that we are safe. For,

II. God's *declared satisfaction with the redemption of Christ*, affords a warrant and encouragement to the sinner, such as should banish all the fears which even a correct and scriptural sense of God's holiness and justice may have awakened in his mind. That he should have a deep and abiding sense of God's holiness and justice, is no more than Scripture requires, and the state of the case demands. That a sense of God's justice, combined with a sense of his own guilt, should awaken fear and terror, is equally plain; but he will thereby be only the better qualified for coming to God as he is revealed in the Gospel. Under this impression, let us turn again to the first passage formerly quoted, a passage in which the whole character of God is revealed, first, as infinitely merciful, and secondly, as strictly holy and just. On reading that passage, the sinner may be disposed to say, oh! how sweet and encouraging is the first part of it, "the Lord God merci-

ful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands,"—this is sweet, it is as cool water to the parched ground;—would that it had ended here! but when I proceed I find it written, "that he will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generations,"—this damps my rising hopes, it sinks my very spirit within me; for am *I* not guilty? and if he will by no means clear the guilty, what avails it *me* that he is merciful and gracious? I am irrecoverably ruined and undone. My guilt and God's justice are, after all, as certain as his loving-kindness; and how, then, can I draw near to God? All this is true. It is equally true, that while, in one passage, we read that "God is love," we read in another, that "our God is a consuming fire." How, then, may a sinner extricate himself from this perplexity,—how may he obtain relief, when he cannot deny his own guilt, and dares not dispute God's justice? Is there one sinner who feels, that were his guilt out of the way, he would willingly go to God, as the Lord God merciful and gracious, and who is debarred only by a sense of divine justice? Let him look to the *cross of Christ*, and he will see the barrier removed; *there* God's character is displayed in all its attributes, and these attributes are seen to be perfectly harmonious. "Truth meets with mercy, and righteousness with peace," and the Lord is beheld as at once the "Just God," and yet "the Saviour." In the cross, the love

and mercy of God appear in the gift of his own Son ; and his justice is at once displayed and satisfied by the atonement which was there required and rendered. By the substitution of Christ as our Redeemer, in our room, and by the infliction of that punishment on him which our sins had deserved, the law was magnified and made honourable,—and the reason for punishment having been removed, God's justice is satisfied ; and now, “ God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses.” He has declared his satisfaction with the work of the Redeemer ; and now, on the ground of that great propitiation, he gives to every sinner the liberty of free access to his throne,—his justice no longer stands in the way ; and, lest the peculiar heinousness of any man's sins should discourage him, he has given forth that gracious declaration,—“ the blood of Jesus cleanseth from *all* sin.”

Behold how the sinner's perplexity is removed ; he sees in the cross that God can be at once the Just God and yet the Saviour, faithful and just even in forgiving his sins, and cleansing him from all iniquity. There he discovers how both parts of that sublime passage may be reconciled ; and how true it is that while, without satisfaction, he would by no means clear the guilty, yet, being satisfied, he is the Lord, *forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin.* Oh ! what relief must the clear apprehension of this one truth impart to the convinced sinner : what a heavy burden must it lift from off his spirit ! he needs not

deny his guilt, or dispute God's justice,—no ; he sees and acknowledges both ; but neither is now a bar in the way of his access to God, for God in Christ, the Judge on the mercy-seat, the Lawgiver on the throne of grace, declares that, by the Redeemer's expiation, he is satisfied, and that now “there is *forgiveness with him and plenteous redemption.*” Neither God's justice, nor the sinner's guilt, nor the demands of a broken law, nor the voice of an accusing conscience, nor the sacred majesty of God's government, should now discourage him. *God is satisfied* with Christ's redemption, and that is enough for us. He has declared his satisfaction, and why should we be doubtful or downcast ? let us rather sing with the prophet, “O Lord, I will praise thee ; for though thou wast angry with me, yet thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust, and not be afraid : for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song ; he also is become my salvation.”

III. Remembering, then, God's gracious and merciful character, and his declared satisfaction with Christ's redemption as the ground of pardon, let us consider the language in which he now speaks to sinners from the mercy-seat, and we shall find in his *invitations* a full warrant for confidence and trust. Both God and Christ invite sinners to draw nigh in such terms as leave no room and no apology for refusing. These invitations are frequently repeated, and given in every variety of form, the best fitted to remove our

doubts, and secure our confidence. They are addressed to *sinner*s as *such*, and to *all* sinners, without exception, to whom the Gospel is sent, insomuch that it may well be said, that if there be a man on earth who is *not* a sinner, to him only are they not applicable; but to every man that is a sinner, and *just because he is a sinner*, they are addressed. Let us listen, then, to the gracious terms in which God speaks to sinners from the mercy-seat, and let us listen to them as if God spoke to us alone. “Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.” “Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and *he will* have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will *abundantly* pardon.” “Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” “Come unto me,” says Christ himself, “all

ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." "And the Spirit (the Holy Ghost) and the bride (the Church universal) say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And *whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*" One might think that these plain and express Scriptures should banish all unbelieving doubt and suspicion; for in them God speaks, Christ speaks, the Spirit speaks, the Church speaks, and all say, Come; but as if a mere permission or invitation were not enough, the apostle represents God as *beseeking* or *entreating* us to come. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we *pray* you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." Now, let me ask my doubting spirit, What reason can justify thy refusal to come to God in Christ, or what excuse can be offered, when so plain a warrant is given, for hesitation or delay? Thou art a sinner—true; but if thou were not a sinner, thou wouldst not need to be saved—the Gospel would not have been addressed to thee. Thou art a great sinner—be it so; but is not Christ a great Saviour too? Thou knowest not whether thy name be written in the book of life—true; but God speaks to thee in his Word; and unless thou art prepared to avow a suspicion of God's sincerity, thou knowest that he has invited thee to draw nigh; and if, notwithstanding, thou refusest, what other account can be

given of thee, than that which the Lord gave of the unbelieving Jews,—“Ye are not willing to come to me that ye might have life?”

IV. Besides the revealed character of God, and his declared satisfaction with the Redeemer's work, and his free and affectionate invitations to sinners, another ground of encouragement may be found in the assurance which he has given of success, confirmed, as that assurance is, by the recorded experience of all who have ever put God's faithfulness to the proof. God's assurance is, that every one that cometh shall be made welcome ; and thus we read in that precious Scripture, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in *no wise* cast out.” This glorious truth rests on God's faithfulness, and should be received with all trust on his bare and simple word ; but it is confirmed and illustrated by the experience of every sinner that has at any time ventured, on the faith of God's word, to come to him. No such sinner has ever been cast out. Every believer can set to his seal that God is true. If we ask any Christian friend whom we know, whether he has ever had occasion to doubt God's faithfulness to his promise, or to repent of his going to God in Christ, on the strength of his testimony, he will tell us—Never : God was more gracious to him, the more he trusted in God ; he drew nigh, and was made welcome ; he has never had reason to regret that he took God at his word ; his only regret is, that he was so long faithless and unbelieving. This is the unanimous testimony of the Church, that

no poor sinner was ever sent empty away. And if it be so, why should any of us doubt our warrant to go to Christ now? Is he not unchangeable—still the same “Lord over all, who is rich in mercy to all that call upon him in truth?” Is not the warrant of faith the same now as it ever was,—as full and as free as it was to them? We are apt to imagine that there is a defect in our warrant—that others have had special revelations which have not been addressed to us; and, before venturing to come to Christ, we seem to wish and expect that something more should be revealed to us than God has revealed in his Word.

But here we err, not knowing the Scriptures, and the power of God. The revealed Word is the *only* warrant of faith. We must come to God on the ground of Bible testimony, if we come at all. It is amply sufficient to justify and to encourage us in venturing to come; and if we believe not Moses and the prophets, if we believe not God speaking in the Word, “neither would we believe though one should rise from the dead.” And, let it be observed, this has been the warrant of faith from the beginning—the sole and sufficient ground on which any sinner was ever prevailed with to betake himself to Christ. It was on the strength of God’s testimony that the apostles believed,—that the confessors and martyrs of the primitive Church believed,—that each and every Christian, since the foundation of the Church was laid, first formed his resolution to cast himself on the forgiving mercy of God. Ask any Christian friend, Had

you any special revelation ; were you told that *your* name was in the book of life ; or, what encouraged you to come to Christ ? and he will answer,—I had no revelation, but that which is in your hands ; I had no insight into the secrets of God's decrees ;—but I read the Bible ; I heard God speaking to sinners in the Word—I knew myself to be a sinner, and that God spoke to me ; I believed his Word, because I judged him faithful that had promised ; I came to him on the warrant of his own invitation, and I have found, in my blessed experience, that “there failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken—all came to pass.”

Such will be the testimony of every child of God. It is true, indeed, that even when the warrant is clear, the sinner may find that there is something in the state of his own mind that hinders him from complying with the gracious invitation ; that, while the way is open, there is a barrier within, arising from the depraved state of his heart, which he cannot overcome in his own strength ; and that, although no new revelation be needful to perfect his *warrant* to believe, a new and spiritual influence is needful to *dispose* him to believe. This is a great and a most momentous truth, but it does not affect our warrant,—*that* is clear, full, and undeniable ; and, being so, if this bar, arising from the depraved state of our own hearts, prevents us from believing, then our final ruin and perdition must not be ascribed to any defect in Christ's Gospel, it lies wholly on our own heads. Would to God that

we all felt this great truth, for it would shut us up to the grace of the Holy Spirit ! God has revealed the Holy Spirit, and his grace will be given in answer to prayer ; for, says he, “ Ask and ye shall receive.” “ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ? ”

V. Finally, if we be still in doubt as to our warrant to come to Christ at once, and without delay, let us consider, that this is not only in Scripture the matter of *permission* and of *encouragement*, but the subject of an express and positive *command*. It is not a mere privilege, which we are at liberty to enjoy ; it is a duty which we cannot neglect or trifle with, without incurring guilt and condemnation. It is given in the shape of a precept,—“ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved ; ” and, lest this should be regarded as partaking more of the nature of an advice than of an injunction, it is expressly called a commandment,—“ This is his *commandment*, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ.” That this commandment imposes an imperative obligation on every sinner, appears from the word which is frequently used in Scripture to denote the reception of the Gospel message ; it is called *obeying* the Gospel, or the *obedience* of faith ; and that guilt is incurred by trifling with that message, or refusing to comply with it, appears from our Lord’s solemn statement,—“ He that believeth on him is not condemned ; but he that

believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God."

He who reflects on such passages, should need little urgency to be persuaded as to his warrant to go to Christ without delay. He may well say, this is no light matter,—it is a matter of life or death: if God had only invited me to come to him, that might have been sufficient; but when he *commands* me, there is no room left for hesitation. I might have felt, had he only given a general permission, that it would have been presumption in so great a sinner as I am, to close with it, or to plead it at his throne; but if it would have been presumption to take his gracious promises to myself, is there not greater presumption in setting myself against his positive command, in refusing to believe when he makes it a matter of express duty? There is now no room for hesitation or delay. He has spoken graciously to me,—he has invited me to draw nigh,—he has commanded me to seek his face,—he has charged me, at the peril of condemnation, to betake myself to Christ as my Saviour;—and I will venture,—“Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.”

Oh! when the poor sufferer, stunned and confounded by the heavy strokes of providence, or lacerated by the keener strokes of conviction in his soul, is almost distracted by the terrors of the Lord, is it not a comfort to him in his affliction, that Jesus himself has said, “Come unto me all ye that *labour and are heavy laden*, and I will give you rest;” and, “him

that cometh to me, I will *in no wise* cast out?" He calls us to come to him with our *burden*,—let it be the burden of guilt, or the burden of sorrow, or the burden of fear, to come and lay it down at the foot of his cross; and, lest the disconsolate spirit should fear that he will not be made welcome, Jesus assures him, that "he will IN NO WISE cast him out." Oh! how sweet and consoling that invitation, and this assurance, to those who are sensible of their condition as sinners and as sufferers; and how should we respond to it, if not in the language of the apostle,—“To whom, Lord, can we go but unto *thee*? thou hast the words of *eternal life*.”

MEDITATION V.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION :”

“The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”—ISAIAH LIV. 10.

IN some hour of pensive thought, every one must have experienced a strange mixture of feelings, in contemplating the aspects of external nature, with reference to the short and uncertain duration of human life. Some objects in nature present, indeed, a fair emblem of our fleeting existence. The lily, which blooms and fades in spring,—the rose, which summer expands, and which sheds its leaves ere summer is closed,—the thousand insects which glitter in the morning sun, and which are brushed to the pool by the breeze of evening,—the vapour which rises from the earth, and floats for a season in the sky, but is dispersed so soon as the meridian sun pours its full flood of light and heat over the earth and sea ;—these objects, so beautiful, and yet so transient,

seem to be faithful emblems of the shortness and uncertainty of human life, and as such, they are referred to in the sacred page, when man, in all his glory, is compared to the "grass which groweth up," and to "the flower of the grass which flourisheth," and "to the vapour which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Other objects in nature are of a firmer texture and more enduring form ; such as the mighty oak, which centuries have confirmed in strength, —the trees of the forest, which our grandsires planted, and under which our fathers rested, and which, after all the storms that have raged around them, still afford us their shelter and shade. In contemplating such objects, a melancholy feeling is apt to steal over us, a feeling as if our age were as nothing in comparison with theirs ; and we are ready to remember, with pensive sadness, the many generations of our friends whom they have survived, and to think, with sadness still more pensive, that the same branches may wave in the wintry wind, or grow green in the spring, or cover the earth with their shadow in autumn, when our frail bodies shall have been laid in their narrow home, and our eye for ever shut to all the loveliness of nature. Yet, even in these objects we may discern the symptoms of age and frailty ; the oak may be gnarled and bent, and here and there a branch may exhibit that rottenness which is the prelude to universal decay. But other objects there are which have had a still longer existence, and yet exhibit no tendency to change : the everlasting hills on which the eyes of our forefathers looked, are still

before us ; we live amidst the mountains to which they repaired as a barrier against invasion, or a refuge from ignoble thralldom ; but where are the millions of our race whom these mountains sheltered ? where the eyes which once rested on their verdure ? where the limbs which toiled up their steep ascent ? A thousand generations of our race have passed away, but these mountains are still substantially the same ; and, in contemplating such scenes, who has not felt a sense of his own insignificance stealing over his spirit, while he thought of the contrast which their stability presents to the frailty of man ? But what shall we say, if even those objects which are *most* stable and enduring, shall be declared by God himself to be frail and perishing in comparison with ourselves ; if the everlasting hills shall be held up as a faint emblem of *our* immortal and imperishable being ; and if, after all the lessons which the flowers of the field, and the fleeting vapours of the sky, and the swiftness of the shadow, have been made to teach us of the vanity and uncertainty of our existence, here, those objects in nature which are of the firmest texture and most enduring form, shall be found, notwithstanding, too frail and fleeting to body forth *our* immortality ? Above all, what shall we say, if those very objects which fill us with the deepest sense of our own frailty, by presenting a contrast in their enduring age to our own uncertain life, shall be selected by God himself, as emblems of his faithfulness to a promise which *eternity* alone can fully accomplish ; and if even the everlasting hills shall be found too transient to re-

present the perpetuity of that kindness which he bears to us, and of that peace which he is willing to confer ? “The mountains *shall* depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

Besides the promise which is directly conveyed to us in these words, they obviously presuppose, or imply, certain great truths which lie at the foundation of Christian comfort and hope.

1. The promise obviously implies the *immortality of man*. It points to the dissolution of the material world, and assures him that he shall survive the wreck of mountains; it refers to the day when the “earth shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll;” but tells us that man, small, and insignificant, and frail as he seems to be, is destined to an immortal existence, and shall be the object of God’s care, after all other things shall have passed away. Did the believer fully realize this truth, which is one of the first elements of his creed, might he not, even when standing amidst the everlasting hills, exclaim,—“Frail as I am, and deeply as in such scenes I feel my frailty, I am still immortal, and their duration shall bear no comparison with mine. True, they have stood the shock of ages, and ages yet to come may leave them where they stand; and long ere they shall depart, nay, long before the trees which crown their summits shall wither or decay, the grave shall have received my mortal

remains ; but the spirit within me cannot die ; it will survive the shock of dissolution ; death will be its birthday into an immortal existence ; and in some future age, may it witness the removal of these mountains, and the dissolution of this world, while still it is exulting in the spring-time of eternal youth."

2. This promise implies *the eternity and immutability* of God, by whom it is made. He speaks as the eternal God, to man as an immortal being. He shall exist, unchanged and unchangeable, after this world shall have passed away. And what is God to his people ? he is their Friend, their Portion, their All. Being assured, then, of their own immortality, what should afford a surer ground of confidence, or nourish a more joyful hope, than the thought that the God whom they love, in whom they trust, and whom they have chosen as their portion, shall exist, and continue the same for ever ? Yea, though all things else be changed,—though the sun be blotted from the sky, and the stars fall from heaven, and a universal change pass over the face of nature, yet, God being for ever the same, he will be their everlasting stay, the "strength of their hearts, and their portion for ever." Did the believer fully realize this second element of his faith, might he not, even when he contemplates his departure out of this world, exclaim, "Take me from this earth, or let the earth itself be dissolved ; let me pass, if it be his will, into the world of spirits ;—yet, being assured of my immortality, and of God's eternal and unchangeable nature, I cannot be unbefriended or forlorn ;

amidst all changes, he will be the same,—in every region, he will be present ; and having my hope and confidence in God, that hope and confidence cannot be impaired by the greatest convulsions of nature.” “Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thine hands: they shall perish, but *thou endurest* ; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment : as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed : but *thou art the same*, and thy years shall have no end.”

3. But what bond subsists betwixt God and man ? What is the ground or warrant of that confidence which we draw from the consideration of God’s eternal subsistence, in respect to our own immortal state ? The bond which connects God with man, the ground and warrant of our confidence, is HIS WORD. It is plainly implied in this promise, that God’s word, the word which he has spoken for the comfort of his people, shall endure, and shall have its accomplishment, after “the mountains have departed, and the hills have been removed.” God gives *his simple word* as our guarantee for eternity ! in the midst of all our fears, he interposes his promise, and that must be our stay ! And is it not sufficient ? His word is immutable as God himself ; by his word, the world was created ; by his word, the world will be dissolved ; and by the same word, his people will be sustained amidst all changes. That is a bond of security which time cannot invalidate, nor death impair, nor the wreck of universal nature destroy,—for, says the apostle, “we are born

again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible ; by the word of God, which *liveth and abideth for ever.*" And then, as if to meet the very fears which a sense of our frailty awakens, he adds, "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away ; but the WORD OF THE LORD ENDURETH FOR EVER. And this is that word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." Of that word, our Lord himself declared, "that heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or one tittle of the law cannot fail,"—and God, "willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath ; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us : which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the vail."

While these three things,—the immortality of man, the immutability of God, and the everlasting verity of his word,—are necessarily implied in this sublime promise, its more direct and immediate object is to assure us of the unchangeable *kindness* of God, and of the everlasting stability of a *covenant* in which that kindness has been embodied, and is revealed. That we shall survive the dissolution of material nature is a sublime truth ; but far more cheering is the assurance, that God's kindness shall not depart from us, nor his covenant of peace be broken.

This covenant, and that kindness, are in some respects distinguishable from each other—his kindness is the cause, the covenant is the effect ;—the former being the spring, in the divine mind, of all those streams of mercy, which flow through the channel of the covenant, for the refreshment of the weary and forlorn.

It is the Covenant of *Grace* which is here spoken of. It is mentioned in connection with God's *kindness* ; and he speaks as a forgiving father : “ my covenant shall not depart, saith the Lord *that hath mercy on thee.*” Blessed be God ! it is not of the covenant of works that he has spoken these unchangeable words, otherwise we might well call upon the hills and the mountains to fall upon us, and hide us from His wrath. The covenant of works is called “ the ministration of death,”—“ the ministration of condemnation,”—but it is added, that it was a ministration *which was to be done away* ; but the covenant here spoken of is “ the ministration of the Spirit,”—“ the ministration of righteousness,”—“ the everlasting covenant,” of which the apostle says, “ if that which is done away was glorious, much more that *which remaineth* is glorious.”

It is a Covenant of *Redemption*. God here speaks as the Redeemer of his people,—“ For a small moment have I forsaken thee ; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment ; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, SAITH THE LORD THY REDEEMER.”

It is God's Covenant. He appropriates it to himself when he calls it the "covenant of *my* peace;" nay, it is identified in Scripture with the necessary and unchangeable attributes of the divine nature. It is called "the counsel of God,"—"the wisdom of God,"—"the power of God unto salvation." So that if there be an immutable perfection in God, which no change in creation can alter, we may rest assured of the stability of that covenant which is the charter of our immortal hopes; his faithfulness, his truth, his love, are all pledged to its accomplishment; and for the honour of his name, as well as for the happiness of his people, "God will ever be mindful of his covenant."

It is a Covenant of *Life*,—eternal life being the end in which it terminates; it is a covenant of *faith*,—faith being the means by which its blessings are enjoyed; it is a covenant of *promises*,—promises which embrace every thing that is needful for our safety and improvement here, and for our endless happiness hereafter; it is a *sure* covenant, based on God's infallible decree, registered in his unchangeable word, and sealed by the Saviour's blood; it is a *well-ordered* covenant, arranged by unerring wisdom, and adapted, in all respects, to the nature and necessities of his people.

It is a covenant of *Peace*, of actual peace with God, and of sensible peace in the heart. Of actual peace, for Christ "hath made peace by the blood of the cross;" he hath taken away the enmity, and laid the ground of a full and everlasting reconciliation betwixt God and his people. So soon as we know the completeness and

sufficiency of Christ's propitiation, and the success with which he discharged the conditions and stipulations of that covenant, we not only see the solid ground of a sinner's acceptance, but we may also enjoy, in a measure proportioned to the strength and constancy of our faith, the sensible experience of peace in our own hearts. And what kind of peace is this? God says, it is "MY PEACE,"—"the very peace of God which passeth all understanding;" and to the same peace the Saviour referred, when, conversing with his sorrowing disciples in the prospect of his departure, he bequeathed it as his dying blessing,—“Peace I leave with you, *my peace* I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid;”—“not as the world giveth,” for it giveth insincerely or partially, or only for a season: its best gifts, even when longest enjoyed, are in their own nature transient;—we shall either be taken away from them, or they shall be taken from us, and assuredly they must terminate when the world itself is no more; but the peace of God, having its seat in the soul, and being independent of all outward conditions, is “a well of water that springeth up unto everlasting life.”

It is an *Everlasting* Covenant. Its origin is hid in the eternal counsels of God before time began, and its issues shall be unfolded after time shall have run its course. The “eternal purpose which he purposed in Jesus Christ before the world was,” although not revealed in all its vastness until “the fulness of times,”

did, nevertheless, determine the course of providence, and influence the condition of the human race, from the beginning ; all events, the fall itself, the subsequent treatment of Adam and his posterity, the rise, establishment, and overthrow of nations and kingdoms, the marvellous economy of the Jews,—all were permitted, with reference to this scheme, and were from the first subordinate, and will ultimately be rendered subservient, to the confirmation and establishment of God's eternal covenant. Down to this hour, it has stood unchanged, and from this hour onwards, to the end of time, will its influence extend ; men will, as of old, ridicule its claims, or deny its truth, or reject its authority, or refuse its proffered blessings ; infidels, and idolaters, and the wicked of all classes, may combine to overthrow it ; the fires of persecution may be lighted, and the sword unsheathed against its defenders ; but that covenant, which rests on the decree of God, which bears the seal of the Redeemer's blood, and to which the Divine Spirit bears witness, shall survive every successive assault, and remain, unchanged and unchangeable, after all its enemies have gone down to the grave ; nay, after the earth itself shall have been dissolved, and every man shall have disappeared from its surface, that covenant, which holds not of earth, but of heaven, shall be still the same,—eternity itself will only unfold its everlasting issues.

These great truths—the immortality of man, the immutability of God, the verity of his word, the stability of his covenant, the unchangeableness of his kindness,

—these are the pillars and supports of Christian faith and hope. They are eternal and unchangeable truths. Therefore may we boldly say, “The Lord is our helper,” —“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be cast into the depths of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.” “My heart and my flesh fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever;” for this is his own imperishable promise,—“The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

Is it true that we are immortal beings? Is it true that there is an unchangeable and eternal God? Is it true that he has spoken to us, and that his Word is in our hands, a Word which shall endure for ever? Is it true that, in that Word, God reveals to us a covenant, in which, if we be personally interested, our safety is infallibly secured in time, and our happiness for eternity? Is it true, that, on our entering within the bonds of this covenant, embracing its promises, and conforming to its holy spirit, our *eternal* state depends? And is it, then, reasonable, is it not rather the deepest infatuation, to delay for one hour the act by which we are to secure an interest in it? Is it right to pass on, from one stage to another of our journey, all the while exposed to sudden death, without having

made the everlasting salvation of our souls a matter of certainty? Would the men of the world thus delay, were a covenant or compact left open for their signature, by which they could secure a rich inheritance for themselves and their children on earth? Would they not be anxious to adhibit their names to the agreement, so as that all parties might be legally bound, lest, by sickness, or death, or some unforeseen contingency, their opportunity of implementing the deed might be forfeited? Yet, this is for an inheritance on the earth, an inheritance which *they* cannot long enjoy, however long *it* may endure, for they and their children must leave it at death. But here is a covenant waiting for our signature, a covenant with God, a charter for an immortal inheritance. Have we signed it for ourselves? have we done our best to get the names of our children enrolled as “heirs of God?” or are we still “strangers to the covenant of promise, without Christ, and so without God, and without hope?”

Gracious God! hast thou reared above us such an economy of grace,—a covenant which, like the bow of heaven, spans the whole horizon of time, and casts on its troubled atmosphere the rays of peace and hope,—and shall we not see thy bow in the clouds, and be glad? Hast thou sent this covenant as an ark on the swelling waters, and shall we not flee to it as our refuge, and be safe? Hast thou let down this golden chain out of heaven, and shall we see it hanging over us, and within our reach, and not lay hold of it? Hast thou placed us under a dispensation, dictated by kind-

ness, designed for peace, founded on a great redemption, sealed with the blood of thine own Son, attested by all thy people as well-ordered in all things and sure, and effectual for the highest and holiest ends of our nature ; and shall we, baptized as we have been into that covenant, educated from our infancy in the knowledge of its truth, and sensible, as we are, that it provides for those wants of our nature which the world cannot supply, and those evils for which the world offers no remedy, shall we,—thus baptized, thus educated, thus *convinced*, turn away from our covenant God, and his everlasting kindness ? God forbid ! what shall support us if this be taken away ? The world is about to be destroyed, and even though *it* were eternal, yet, being mortal, *we* cannot long enjoy it,—our bodies must be dissolved,—and our immortal, imperishable spirits, what will be their destination at the hour of death ? what hopes could we cherish, nay, what dark forebodings might we not feel, were we not supported by God's own recorded promise,—“ The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

MEDITATION VI.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION :”

“ We have a Great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God ”—“ not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. ”—HEB. IV. 14, 15.

IN these words, the same divine person, “ Jesus the Son of God,” is presented in two very different aspects,—in the one, as a suffering—in the other, as an exalted Redeemer ; and the sorrows which he endured on earth are referred to, as having conduced to the perfection of his character, and the efficacy of his work, as our High Priest in heaven.

Referring to his sufferings on earth, the apostle declares that “ he was in all points tempted like as we are.” The Redeemer himself is thus presented to our view as a SUFFERER ; and, perhaps, the most instructive statement respecting the use of affliction, and one which may best serve at once to show its necessity, and to teach us patience in enduring it, is the state-

ment of the apostle, that "it became God, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation *perfect through sufferings*."

From the disparity of the two cases, it is evident that suffering could not be designed, in all respects for the same uses, when it was applied to "the Captain of our salvation," as when it is inflicted on ourselves. He did not need, like his people, to be convinced of the unsatisfying nature of created happiness, nor to be weaned from attachment to the world, nor to be trained, by any process of discipline, into a state of perfect conformity to the divine will. No alloy of sinful appetite or passion impaired the purity even of his human soul, for he was "without sin." We are taught, indeed, to believe, that his human nature was, like ours, progressive. He was born into our world in a state of infancy, and although perfect, as being free from every natural defect or moral blemish, yet his human soul was capable of progress, for "he grew in wisdom as well as in stature." And since, in our own experience, suffering is conducive to the progress of wisdom, who can tell how far the discipline of affliction may have served to expand the powers and to foster the graces by which his holy humanity was adorned! But, leaving this inquiry, I observe, that it is not in regard to his human nature, viewed apart from the divine, that the apostle here speaks; his words refer to Christ, as "God manifested in the flesh," or as "Emmanuel, God with us." And it is of Christ, in his one person, and in his official character as the Captain of our

salvation, that he affirms that "he was made perfect through sufferings." It is declared that these sufferings were essential to his offices, and that they served to perfect his qualifications *as our Mediator*.

In meditating on this view of the subject, we cannot fail to see,

That his sufferings perfected his character as Mediator, inasmuch as they constituted that *atonement for sin*, by which he had engaged to redeem his people. That our Lord was personally free from sin, is too frequently and plainly stated in the sacred volume, to admit of being either doubted or denied; and, for this reason, it might have been expected that he would have been exempt from all suffering, and especially from death, which is declared to have been "the wages of sin;" and unquestionably, had he become incarnate for any other purpose than that of expiating the sins of others, he would have been as free from suffering as he was from guilt, and his life would have been as much distinguished for its felicity, as it was remarkable for its holiness. But "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." These sufferings were necessary, for "without the shedding of blood there is no remission;" and they were so endured, as to render him *perfect*, as the Captain of our salvation. Notwithstanding the pressure of that fearful weight of guilt which crushed his soul, and caused him to be "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," he persevered till he obtained the

victory; and although, towards the conclusion of his sorrows, they were awfully aggravated by the judicial withdrawment of his Father's countenance, when he was *forsaken* and left alone amidst the darkness of Calvary, yet, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, till he could say, *It is finished*. And then, as our redemption was completed, so, as our Redeemer, he was made perfect through suffering. By his sufferings his mediatorial work was fulfilled, and on the ground of his atoning sacrifice, he was qualified "to save unto the very uttermost all that come unto God by him;" the valley of humiliation and sorrow being the path through which he reached the glories of that mediatorial throne, where he now reigns as a Prince and a Saviour, giving repentance and the remission of sins. And should not this comfort the mourner? that he has a *perfect* Saviour to look to,—one who was severely tried, but who has nobly triumphed, and who has already cleared away every obstacle, and opened up a free access to pardon and peace!

The sufferings of Christ were not only necessary as an expiation for sin, but also to perfect his *example*. He is represented in Scripture as the pattern, not less than as the priest of his Church. It is true he might have given an example of holiness, without subjecting himself to that humiliation and debasement by which the narrative of his life is distinguished; but had he not been brought into circumstances similar to those of his people, his example would neither have been so perfect in itself, nor so well adapted to the situation of

those for whose imitation it was designed. Had he appeared in the form of man, but exempt from all the frailties and wants to which human nature is subject,—had he lived on earth surrounded with the glories of his divinity, or even in the enjoyment of that affluence and those honours by which the great men of this world are distinguished,—had he never known the bitterness of human sorrow, the privations of poverty, the pains of hunger and thirst, and the sickness and toil by which the spirit of man is overwhelmed, he would have been regarded rather as an extraordinary exception than as an example to the common race of men; and any sentiment of admiration which his character might have awakened, would have been mingled with a feeling of envy for his lot. In these circumstances, too, he could not have manifested some graces of character which it was his great object to inculcate on his disciples, and which their circumstances in the present world must frequently call them to exercise,—such as patience under suffering, resignation to the divine will, and unshaken integrity in the midst of trials and sorrows. Hence he assumed our nature, with all its sinless infirmities and wants; he became “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;” and there is not one form of privation, nor one kind of suffering, to which any of us can be exposed, which was not endured by him, whose character, from the manger to the cross, was that of “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” And in proportion as his sufferings were numerous and severe, so was his example the more perfect, and the

better fitted to engage the admiration of all who are called to endure any one of the many sorrows which were crowded into his lot.

It does not fall within our present province to deduce from his example the many instructive lessons which it affords, but only to apply it for the consolation of those who, like him, are subject to severe affliction. That it does furnish a very precious consolation to mourners, is evident from its being specially applied to their case by the apostle, when, referring to their numerous trials, he commands them to “consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest they be weary and faint in their minds.” The simple fact that he *was* afflicted, and afflicted, too, by a very sore and protracted series of trials, should serve to banish from their minds the idea that affliction is necessarily the fruit of divine wrath, or the token of a hopeless state, for he was afflicted at the very time when God regarded him “as his well-beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased.”

In Christ’s afflictions every believer may find the counterpart of his own.

Born of parents occupying the lowest rank in society, he was, from his earliest infancy, subject to the privations of poverty; and even in advanced life, and when engaged in the prosecution of his public ministry, “he had not where to lay his head.” Are any of his people subject to the same privations, straitened in their worldly circumstances, and dependent on the daily bounty of Providence for the supply of their sim-

plest wants ; and do they sometimes feel a disposition to be “careful and troubled,” or even to murmur at the unequal distribution of temporal comforts ? let them look to the Saviour, and let them reflect that it was for their sakes he descended into a state of poverty, that he might give a perfect example of contentment and cheerfulness, even in the most adverse circumstances, and of humble trust in the providence of him “who feeds the ravens when they cry,”—and can they find it in their hearts to murmur or complain because of *their* poverty, when they read of the poverty of the Son of God ? Are any afflicted by reason of the alienation of friends, or the malice of enemies ? are they suffering in their good name, or in their worldly respectability, by ridicule or calumny ? or have they tasted the bitterness of being betrayed by those in whom they reposed their confidence, or repaid with ingratitude by those whom they had served ? Let them look to the Saviour, and behold him forsaken in early life by his nearest relatives,—surrounded with enemies the more inveterate and hostile, because he had offered no provocation except to love,—his character assailed as one in league with Beelzebub, although he was infinitely holier than we can pretend to be,—followed by persecution whithersoever he went,—repaid with ingratitude even by those for whose benefit he had exerted miraculous power,—and at length betrayed by one of his own disciples, who had lived and sojourned with him for years ! And shall any complaint be heard from us, respecting the treachery of friends or

the malice of enemies, when none proceeded from the Son of God? or shall we venture to cherish resentment, or to meditate revenge, when we read, that when "he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously," and died with these words on his lips, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?" Are any called, in the course of providence, to endure suffering unusually severe, or to make sacrifices peculiarly painful, or to undertake labours from which they are disposed to shrink? let them look to the Captain of their salvation, who felt, as they feel, the severity of his trials, and the arduous nature of his work, and who more than once expressed his feelings in this earnest supplication, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" but added, "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." And can they, after this, venture in any thing to oppose the will, or to murmur at the appointments of God, when Christ, even in the very depths of *his* agony, resigned himself to suffer according to his Father's will? In the lot of our Saviour, not only one or a few of these evils were found, but all were combined, and each in its highest measure, as if it were God's purpose to exhibit, in *his* person, every form of human suffering, and in one "man of sorrows," to give an example to all who are, in any measure, "acquainted with grief." We can scarcely point to one form of misery, excepting that of personal guilt, to which we may not find a counterpart in the life of Jesus. And thus was his

example *perfected*,—a suffering Saviour becomes the pattern of his suffering people.

And what variety of character is thus concentrated in his one example ! immaculate purity combined with vigilance in resisting temptation,—firmness and composure in the midst of difficulties, united with simple dependence on his Father's providence,—the noblest magnanimity appearing under the most humble deportment,—a generous indignancy against whatever was base or dishonourable in the conduct of his enemies, united with a most tender and loving temper toward their persons. In the lowest depths of his humiliation, the Redeemer was sensible of the honour which was due to him, yet he bore reproaches and insults with a meek and quiet spirit,—he was often fatigued, but never enervated by exertion,—beset, but never daunted by dangers,—assailed by persecution, yet not diverted from his purpose,—as firm against the oppressor, as he was kind to the oppressed. Considering all the various aspects of his character as they are presented in the narrative of his life, we see how many of the most precious and engaging of its qualities have been developed by his afflictions ; and how true it is, in reference to his example, as well as to his atoning sacrifice, that, as the Captain of our salvation, “ he was made perfect through suffering.” Still farther,

The sufferings of the “ Captain of our salvation ” served to perfect his mediatorial character, and to promote the end of his mission, inasmuch as they give us the assurance of his *sympathy*. The human spirit,

when pressed down with sorrow, longs for sympathy, and the sympathy which it seeks is that of a being possessed of kindred feelings with its own. Even from amongst men, what sufferer will select for his friend and comforter in adversity, one who has enjoyed a life of uninterrupted prosperity, and who has never tasted the bitterness of sorrow? he seeks to another stricken spirit for sympathy. Let an angel descend from the upper sanctuary to visit the mourner, kind and benevolent as may be his words, he is felt to be an angel still; and the mourner yearns for a human heart to which he may confide his sorrows—a heart filled with the homely feelings of humanity, and feelings tried as his own have been.

Jesus, the Son of God, became man, and took “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,” that *he* might have a fellow-feeling with our infirmities, and that *we* might have the strong consolation of his sympathy in the hour of trial. It is true, that in his divine nature, he was omniscient, and that all our wants were known to him before he descended into an estate of humiliation; his experience has added nothing to his infinite knowledge; but, oh! it *has* served to endear him to his suffering people, and to adapt his character to *their* need. We cannot venture to make his human experience the subject of our speculation; but we are assured of the fact, that to his Godhead humanity was united; and we are taught in Scripture to regard the feelings of his human nature as uniting him to us in the bond of brotherhood, and as an additional motive

to confide in his love. For thus saith the apostle, "We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are ;" "let us *therefore* come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

The benefit of his sufferings, as affording an assurance of his sympathy, will be farther apparent, if we now meditate,

On the same divine person not only as a suffering, but also as an exalted Redeemer ; and consider the sorrows which he endured on earth, as having conduced to the perfection of his character, and the efficacy of his work as our High Priest in heaven. In the one clause, the Redeemer is described as "a man of sorrows," "who was tried in all points like as we are ;" in the other, as "a Great High Priest, who has passed into the heavens." His exaltation to glory is a grand and consoling truth to his people, and it is here presented as the rock of their confidence and hope,—"*we have* a Great High Priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God ;"—a Priest,—a High Priest,—a Great High Priest,—a Great High Priest that has passed into the heavens ;—what shall we add more ? *Jesus the Son of God !* The glory of his divine person, and the dignity of his exalted state, may well cheer us in the darkest hour ; but the brightness of his glory, and the height of his exaltation, are enhanced and endeared to his suffering people, by the touching recollection, that "he, too,

was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." It is the same divine person that has passed into the heavens, and there taken his place at the right hand of God, far above all principality and power, who once trode the same vale of tears which we now tread, and shared our feelings as well as our fortunes on earth; who stood by the bier of the widow's son, and who groaned in spirit, and was troubled, and *wept* at the grave of Lazarus, and who spoke soothingly to his weeping sisters; who, in his own person, felt what it was to live a suffering life, and to die a painful death; and in the pangs of hunger and thirst, in the privations of poverty, in the perils of persecution, and in the deep agony of the garden and the cross, tasted every variety of human sorrow, and sounded the lowest depths of human nature. The same divine person, who then suffered and wept, "*has passed into the heavens,*"—but think not that he has left his human sympathies behind him. There, as here, he is our High Priest,—a Great High Priest, and highly exalted,—yet, not the less a "merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God,"—a High Priest, who is, indeed, "the brightness of his Father's glory," yet, "made like unto his brethren," that having himself suffered, being tempted, "*he might be able to succour them that are tempted.*" He is *our* High Priest still: amidst the glories of the upper sanctuary, the same gracious work, and the same suffering people, engage his thoughts, as when he sojourned on earth: here he offered a sacrifice for sin, which he

there presents at the throne; and he is exalted for the very purpose of carrying into effect, and bringing to its completion, that work of redeeming mercy which brought him down from heaven.

The office which he still sustains, and the work in which he is engaged on our behalf, are of the highest importance to our wellbeing; and the consideration of his sufferings on earth, imparts to his agency in heaven a character of tenderness which is fitted to cheer the disconsolate spirit, and to invite its confidence and hope.

“He is exalted, AS A SAVIOUR, to give repentance and the remission of sins.” He has the power of dispensing pardon; and who will question his willingness to exercise it? Did he undertake the work of redemption, “and humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” that he might accomplish it; and is he unwilling freely to bestow the pardon which he so painfully procured? Was “his soul exceeding sorrowful even unto death,” that sin might be forgiven? And now, that he has passed into the heavens, crowned with victory, will he withhold the fruits of his triumph? Has he addressed to every sinner who hears the Gospel, the most tender invitations, and called them, in accents of strong persuasion, to “come to him?” And will any one sinner, however guilty or forlorn, be coldly received or sternly repulsed, when, taking Christ’s own word for his warrant, he looks up to him in prayer? Oh! little do we know the tenderness of his heart, and the

freeness of his grace, if we can for one instant entertain these dark suspicions. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth *from all sin*." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." The warrant is clear; no bar remains to shut us out from the Saviour; and the fact, that he suffered and died to redeem us, affords a precious assurance, that he is willing as well as "able to *save unto the very uttermost*, all that come unto God by him."

He is also represented AS OUR ADVOCATE OR INTERCESSOR with the Father. He stands engaged to plead our cause in heaven. On earth he prayed for his disciples, and he prays for them still. Ere yet he left the world, he remembered their sad estate, the trials which were yet before them, and the dangers by which they should be surrounded, and he offered up for them, and for us, that touching prayer:—"Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me." "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil." "Sanctify them through thy truth." "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

Is any mourner so disconsolate that he cannot pray,—so bowed down to the earth, by the pressure of sorrow, that he cannot venture to lift his eye to the throne? Let him hear the Redeemer's prayer for him, and take courage; and let him remember, that such as he was when he uttered that prayer on earth, such is he still in heaven. What can be more consoling than to know that we go not unbefriended to the throne of the Eternal; that at God's right hand we have an advocate, even Jesus Christ the righteous; that he has a fellow-feeling with us in all our infirmities; that he has himself known the heart of a suppliant, and, that even as he once made supplication, with strong crying and tears, so will he sympathize with our earnestness, and present our prayers with a feeling of personal interest at his Father's throne.

He is represented as our PROPHET OR TEACHER; and what can be more consoling than to know, that, in the days of his humiliation, he was himself in a state of infancy, and grew in wisdom as well as in stature, since it gives us the assurance, that "he can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way;" that he will sympathize with our feelings, and make allowance for our slowness, and encourage, rather than rebuke, our feeble and imperfect efforts? "*He* will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." The narrative of his life on earth contains many incidents that are fitted to invite our confidence in him, as a very tender and compassionate teacher; for, although possessed of

infinite knowledge, and grieved oftentimes by the narrow prejudices of his disciples, oh ! with what patience did he unravel their perplexities, and bear with their perverse ignorance, and guide them, step by step, into the knowledge of saving truth, “ giving them line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little,” “ according as they were able to bear it ;” not tasking their feeble powers, but allowing them gradually to open, and, as they opened, filling them with the purest light ; encouraging the timid, gently restraining the froward, and rebuking none save such as were captious enemies to the truth ; while, over the whole field of instruction, was shed the light of his benignant love, and of his glorious example. Let the disconsolate spirit rejoice and be glad, for the Redeemer is still the teacher of his people ; and with the same patience and tenderness as of old, will he bear with their infirmities, and guide them into all truth.

For this end, and also for the sanctification and comfort of his people in all ages, he is the DISPENSER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. “ I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth ;” “ who dwelleth with you, and shall be in you ;” and “ the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.” The Redeemer has not been unmindful of his gracious promise ; for, referring to the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, Peter declared, “ that being by the right hand of God exalted, and having

received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear ;” and believers in all ages have acknowledged the faithfulness of his promise, and the unspeakable value of this gift ; attributing all their spiritual discernment of divine truth, all their progress in the work of sanctification, and all their enjoyment of spiritual consolation, to the influences of that Divine Spirit who has engaged “ to help their infirmities,” and to instruct, purify, and comfort the minds of the disciples. Is any mourner, then, weighed down by a sense of his ignorance, or the hardness and insensibility of his heart, or the prevalence of corruption, or great spiritual darkness, which shuts out every ray of Christian peace and hope ; and does he feel that all the consoling views which the Bible presents of the nature and ends of affliction, can have no effect on his mind, so long as it is thus hardened by sin, and overshadowed with darkness ? Let him look to the Holy Spirit of promise, and rejoice that an all-sufficient Sanctifier is provided ; one who can subdue the deadliest corruption, and cure the most hopeless ignorance, and dispel the deepest darkness ; let him pray for his assistance and blessing ; and, to encourage his hope, let him remember, that the Redeemer who died for him, has authority to dispense the Spirit, and that his own Word assures him, that his assistance will be given in answer to prayer. “ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more* will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ?”

The Redeemer is exalted as *head over all things* to his Church. He is not only the king of his people, the master whom they serve, and who will not lay upon them more than they are able to bear, but he presides over *every thing*, both in nature and in grace, by which their interests can in any way be affected, and he conducts his universal government with a view to their good.

The inference which the apostle draws from the fact, that "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son," is, that "if God spared not his own Son, but gave him up to the death for us all, *much more* will he with him also freely give us *all things*." And what is meant by the "all things" here spoken of, we gather from that noble passage, which may well be called the charter of the believer's privileges: "*All things* are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Our interest in this glorious charter rests on the right of Christ, with whom we are *joint heirs*. And of him it is said, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given *all things* into his hand;" and that he hath made him "*head over all things* to the Church, which is his body." From the intimate union which subsists betwixt the Redeemer and his people, and the deep interest which he takes in their welfare, the apostle draws the consoling conclusion, "We know that *all things* work together for good to them that love God."

We have already seen, that, amidst the numerous

afflictions of life, mourners may derive consolation from the thought, that God's providence presides over their affairs ; * but the Bible does give a *new aspect* to providence, and an additional ground of comfort, when *it represents all the affairs of this world as being subordinated, under the mediatorial government of the Saviour, to the scheme of redemption, and as concurring with the means embraced in that scheme for the promotion of God's glory and his people's happiness.*

In this view, the scheme of redemption is not only the principal feature of providence, but it throws a clear light over every other part of it. Like the sun, which is not only the most glorious object in the firmament, but which sheds its lustre over every part of nature, and gilds with its beams what would else have been dark and cheerless as the grave, so the scheme of redemption, while it is the most glorious object which the volume of providence presents, casts its own sacred light over every page of that volume, and gilds with the rays of mercy and peace, the darkest mysteries which it contains.

For the whole government of the world is represented as having been confided to the Saviour himself, so that we have the unspeakable consolation of knowing, that the same divine and compassionate Redeemer, who suffered, and bled, and died on our account, has the entire management of our affairs ; that the same love which prompted him to accomplish the work of our

redemption, still actuates his holy administration ; and that nothing can happen in the course of providence which is not permitted or appointed by him “ who loved us and gave himself for us.” In proportion to our persuasion of his love, should be our confidence in his government ; and what proof of sincerity, or what pledge of love, can we desire which is not afforded by his past dealings on our behalf? If he died for us, will he not now, when all things are put under his power, “ make all things work together for our good?” And may we not rest assured, that the love which he manifested on earth is but a pledge of the love which he still bears to us, and that he will neither forget nor forsake us, until he has accomplished the grand end of his mission by our deliverance from all evil, and our joyful entrance into the kingdom of heaven?

True, there may still be much mystery in the methods of his providence, and we may often be at a loss to discover the operation of that divine love which he is pledged to exercise on our behalf; clouds and darkness may encompass our path, and at times our faith in the superintending love of the Redeemer may be ready to fail ; but we have his sure and faithful word of promise, “ that he will *never* leave us nor forsake us.” That promise is sealed by his precious blood, in which we have both a proof and a pledge of his sincerity, that should silence every murmur of doubt or despair. We have the testimony of all his disciples in every age, that, when “ they trusted in him they were

not ashamed ; and that, although they were oftentimes “led by a way which they did not know,” he made “darkness light before them, and crooked things straight ;” and, resting on this foundation in the humble confidence of faith, may we not say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until the great day?”

Oh ! how cheering to know, that Christ is now the same in heaven as he was when on earth ; that the glory of heaven has not changed him ; that, when he died, he did not throw aside our nature, but resumed it at his resurrection, and still retains it in personal union with the divine ; that, amidst the joys of heaven, he has not forgotten any one of his “little flock,” for whom he suffered in the garden and on the cross ; that he who was “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,” is now made “head over all things,” yet, that he still regards us with a brother’s eye ; that, having borne our grief, he still sympathizes with our sorrows, —“a *Great High Priest* passed into the heavens,” yet, “touched with a feeling of our infirmities !” While awed by the majesty of his Godhead, how cheering to think of the tenderness of his humanity ; and, when almost afraid to lift up our eyes to the place where his honour dwelleth, how affecting the thought, that there is a *human heart on the throne.*

MEDITATION VII.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“ THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION .”

“ *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*” “ *No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness in them which are exercised thereby.*”—HEB. XII. 6-11.

THE Bible affords a solid ground of comfort under trial, in the views which it presents of the USES and ENDS of affliction, under the economy of redemption. While it declares, that all our afflictions proceed from the hand of God, and that he employs them as a means of manifesting the rectitude, and vindicating the honour of his government, it affirms, nevertheless, that he takes no pleasure in the infliction of suffering for its own sake, and that “ he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” * Had the Bible presented no other than this negative view of affliction, it would still have cleared the character of God from the unworthy suspicion, that he takes a cruel or capricious delight in the infliction of suffering, and would have

* MEDITATION II.

served so far to compose our minds under trial, by giving us the assurance, that no suffering would be inflicted without some reason which was satisfactory to infinite benevolence and wisdom. But the Bible is far from confining its consoling discoveries to this *negative* view of the subject: it not only denies that affliction is the result of caprice or cruelty, but affirms that, under the scheme of grace, it is the result of pure and comprehensive benevolence, and the means of *positive* good.

It is one of the grandest peculiarities of the scheme which is unfolded in Scripture, that it subordinates every thing to one great and beneficent end,—that it educes from acknowledged evil the most substantial good,—that it makes *sin* the occasion of a bright display of divine holiness, and *suffering* the occasion of a marvellous manifestation of divine love,—and that, in its application to the hearts of men, it converts the very afflictions, which are the fruits of sin, into the means of progressive sanctification and eternal blessedness. The legal desert of “the old man” is thus made the moral discipline of “the new creature,”—the penalty under the Law becomes a privilege under the Gospel,—and those afflictions, which were awarded as the “wages of transgression,” are converted, by the scheme of redemption, into “means of grace.”

This is beautifully intimated in the 89th Psalm, where, in stating the terms of the covenant of grace, God makes affliction the subject of a *promise* to the Redeemer, as the head of that covenant, and through him to his believing people:—“If his children forsake

my law, and walk not in my judgments ; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments ; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." Being provided for in the covenant of grace, and made the matter of a promise to the Redeemer, these chastisements are to be regarded as among the *privileges* of God's people. It is true, that had they not sinned, they would have been exempted from suffering ; and their trials are, therefore, in one sense, the consequences of guilt. But it is equally true, that they are not now awarded as the wages or penal effects of transgression, but subordinated to a plan of mercy, and sent for purposes of good. They come from God, not as messengers of his avenging wrath, but as tokens of his paternal love ; and in sending them, he acts, not as an offended judge, awarding punishment, but as a kind and forgiving father, meting out such discipline and correction to his children as they severally require.

It does not follow from these remarks, that every one who is visited with affliction is a child of God, or that, in every instance, affliction has the effect of instating the sufferer in that blessed condition. Like every other means, its effect will depend on the mode in which it is improved by the individual ; and hence it is said to produce "the peaceable fruits of righteousness" only in those who are suitably "exercised thereby." In many cases, as in that of Pharaoh, it may

be the means of hardening the heart, and may leave it more insensible to every right feeling, and more callous to every sacred impression than before ; but this is no reason why we should not admire the benevolence, as well as the wisdom of God, in sending affliction, any more than the neglect of the ordinary and prescribed means, on the part of men, should lead us to question the goodness of God in giving them his Word and ordinances. By these, God furnishes them with an opportunity of improvement and a means of salvation ; and in like manner, by affliction, he summons their attention to divine things, and calls upon them to repent and be saved.

But while these words do not affirm that every one who is severely afflicted is a child of God, they do, on the other hand, assure us, that no amount, and no continuance of sorrow, can be a proof that we are *not* members of his family ; and this discovery may well be regarded as a very valuable and a very consoling one. For, when a believer is visited with severe affliction, and especially if his trials be numerous as well as severe, and if they be continued in his person, or in his family, for a great length of time, while many around him are enjoying uninterrupted prosperity, or speedily relieved from slighter trials, he will be too apt to entertain the awful thought, that God would not thus deal with him if he were really one of his children, and either despondingly to question his own interest in the divine favour, or, through the malignant suggestions of Satan, to cherish hard thoughts of

God. Many have experienced this sore trial of their patience and faith; but let it be impressed on our hearts, that it is not from the outward dispensations of providence, but from the inward qualities of our own character, that we are to draw the evidence of our state in the sight of God,—that no pressure of affliction, however severe, and no continuance of it, however protracted, can prove that we are not the objects of God's fatherly love, or that we are cast out of his favour; and that, although the aspect of a frowning providence may well be improved as a call to vigilant self-inspection, that we may discover whether God has any controversy with us, and for what cause, we should not, on any occasion, venture to regard affliction as a proof of reprobacy. On the contrary, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth;" and if our chastisements seem to be more grievous, and more protracted than those of others, we may rest assured, either that our corruptions are so strong as to require a severe remedy, or that God is thereby preparing us for some great end, for some fiery temptation, or some eminent service in his Church on earth, or, perhaps, for a speedy translation to his own presence in heaven. But whatever may be the immediate reasons of his dealings with us, let us rest assured, that every affliction which he sends on any of his children is the fruit of paternal love,—that he has a most holy, wise, and benevolent purpose in view,—and that, either here or hereafter, we shall have reason to acknowledge with many who have gone

before us, that "God hath done all things well," and that "in very faithfulness he hath afflicted us."

We are taught in these words, not only that divine love is the source from which the afflictions of God's people proceed, but that the end for which they are designed is the gradual improvement and ultimate perfection of their moral character.

According to the Scriptures, all suffering, under God's administration, has a *moral end*. Were we to view affliction by itself, and without reference to its results, it would necessarily appear a very dark and mysterious part of divine providence. Physical evil, apart from its moral uses, cannot be an object of pleasing contemplation to any rational being in the universe; but, in connection with these uses, it may be one of the brightest manifestations of divine wisdom, and one of the clearest proofs of his comprehensive benevolence.

We are not, indeed, at liberty to suppose, that suffering under the divine government is merely corrective. On the contrary, it is, in the case of the impenitent, judicial, penal, and exemplary, in the strictest sense of the terms. But even in that case, although the party immediately subject to it be not benefited, yet the infliction of punishment on account of sin, may, nevertheless, conduce to the moral instruction of unnumbered myriads of intelligent creatures, and to their confirmation in those habits of holy obedience, which, without such moral lessons, might be in danger of being broken by the power of temptation,—since, to the power of temptation, we have reason to believe, they are exposed

in common with those who have already fallen. God's government is conducted by means,—to his rational creatures he presents rational inducements ; and, in this view, the final punishment of some may be the result of the most comprehensive benevolence to his subjects at large, just as the incarceration, or capital punishment, of a few in this kingdom, is the means, if not of reclaiming them, yet of impressing on the minds of others the great distinctions of morals, and the obligations of social duty.

But here we speak of affliction in reference to its bearings on God's people ; and, in their case, not only is there a moral influence exerted on others by means of their afflictions, but a direct moral end contemplated in their own blessed experience. God visits them with affliction, that “ by the sadness of the countenance the heart may be made better ;” and just in proportion as moral improvement and perfection are superior to mere physical enjoyment or worldly prosperity, in the same proportion ought our gratitude for the benefit conferred, to exceed our sorrow for the suffering inflicted. To a mind which is sensible wherein the true nobility and happiness of its nature consist, there can be no difficulty in perceiving, that whatsoever tends to subdue unruly passion, or to implant, invigorate, and cherish the higher principles and affections of the soul, should be valued in proportion to the greatness of its design, however painful it may be in itself. And if the nauseous draught be received with eagerness, when the restoration of bodily health is expected from it, how

much more should we be willing to taste of that cup of sorrow, however bitter, by which our immortal spirits are to be restored to a state of moral healthfulness and vigour?

That the general design of all the afflictions with which any of God's people are visited in the present state, is their progressive sanctification and final perfection, is evident from the whole scope and tenor of Scripture, wherein the necessity and usefulness of affliction, for this end, are frequently stated in very emphatic terms, and illustrated by apposite examples: "This is the will of God concerning you," says the apostle, "even your *sanctification*;" and this being the grand object of God's design in Scripture, is also the end of all his dealings in providence. It is not only said, "that affliction yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness," but that "God chastens us not for his pleasure, but for our profit, that we *might be partakers of his holiness*." That this is the design of all the afflictions with which we are visited, may well serve to reconcile us to them, even when they are most frequent and most severe. For to a mind that is sensible of its own high capacity, and of its best interests, what object can appear so truly great or desirable as this,—a progressive and ultimately a perfect conformity, through the sanctification of its powers, to the very image and character of God? That *man* is capable of such a resemblance, is the very highest proof of his dignity as a rational and moral being. That God designs such a resemblance, is the noblest

proof of his affection ; for what higher gift could he bestow than a character similar to his own ? And that affliction is one of the means by which this boon is to be bestowed, and this resemblance improved and perfected, is one of the most precious truths of Scripture, and the very sweetest consolation of sorrow. Were we sensible of the infinite capacities for improvement and happiness which such a design, on the part of God, necessarily implies on the part of man ; were we duly impressed with the consideration, that the nobility of our nature consists in our capacity of knowing God, and being like to him ; that the misery and degradation of our present estate, flow from our ignorance of God, and the dissimilarity of our thoughts and feelings to those of the Divine mind ; that our only prospect of being restored either to honour or happiness, depends on our being restored, in some measure, to a state of conformity to the will and likeness of God ; and that, for this high and lofty end, affliction is employed as a means by which, if duly improved, that end may be attained in some measure on earth, and enjoyed perfectly and eternally in heaven ;—oh ! what heart would then murmur or complain, because of the strokes by which the rock is beaten into a conformity with God's image ; or because of the fire of that furnace, by which the dross of our nature is separated from the pure and precious ore, and out of which we are to come as “ gold seven times purified, —vessels of honour, fitted for the Master's use ? ”

That affliction is a means *fitted* to this end, might

be inferred from the fact, that it is employed as such by a God of unerring wisdom, who knows our frame and all the influences by which it can be affected, for good or for evil. But we are not left to conceive of it as an arbitrary appointment, betwixt which and its end, no natural adaptation can be traced. It is not only a sovereign, but a suitable remedy, and adapted, in many respects, to the evil which it is designed to cure. The evil of our present condition consists mainly in our affections being estranged from God and given to the creature; in our tendency to "forsake the fountain of living waters, and to hew out for ourselves in the world, cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water." The connection betwixt alienation from God and attachment to the creature, is so intimate and sure, that the one is inseparable from the other; it being a law of our nature, that our affections and desires must have some object on which they fix their regards, and from which they draw, or expect, their gratification; and if they be once estranged from God, their proper object, they will infallibly fix on some one or more objects in the world. Nor is their attachment to these objects, when once formed, capable of being easily broken. If they are attached to wealth, they cling to it with the tenacity of avarice; if to sensual indulgence, with the blind infatuation of passion; if to power, with the recklessness of ambition; insomuch, that so long as these objects are within their grasp, or capable of being either enjoyed or hoped for, they will effectually fill and occupy the whole mind, and exclude God and

all spiritual things. Now, God's method of breaking up this unhallowed and degrading attachment betwixt a rational and immortal creature, and the lying vanities of the world, is by either removing the favourite object from his reach, or smiting it with a curse, or visiting him with sickness, which spoils his relish for it; in one way or other, God shatters his favourite cistern, so as that he shall find it to be "a broken cistern, which can hold no water." Were this done, after all his fond dreams of happiness, and his earnest endeavours for its attainment, with no other view than to disappoint his hopes and blast his efforts, we might pity the fate of man, and wonder at the dispensations of God; but when it is done with the view of severing his affections from objects which are unworthy of them, and which, even were they attained, could not satisfy or fill the desires of an immortal spirit; and, above all, with the view of raising his thoughts and affections to God himself, as his chief good and satisfying portion, we cannot fail at once to see the benevolence which prompts God to interpose, and the wisdom of the means by which he endeavours to raise man to his true happiness, by the overthrow of his dearest earthly delusions, and the disappointment of his fondest earthly hopes.

Thus, a man who, forgetting his immortal prospects, debases his nature by making himself the slave of avarice; whose earliest thoughts and whose latest cares are engrossed with money; who thinks of nothing, speaks of nothing, cares for nothing, and does nothing, without a reference to the accumulation of a fortune;

who, for this, lives the life of a slave, and stirs not from his place of business, and plies the oar of trade "from shining morn to dewy eve;"—on such a man, what could have so powerful an effect as the total ruin of his fortune, and the scattering of his gains? Cruel, indeed, would such an issue be to all his anxious thoughts, and prudent plans, and industrious habits, and bold enterprises, had he no other than an earthly prospect; but God designs that man for eternity,—he offers him a portion in heaven,—money stands between him and that prospect; and God dashes the cup of prosperity from his trembling hand, that it may not drown his soul in everlasting perdition. And is not this a benevolent deed? Is it not dictated by the highest wisdom, as the very discipline which is most necessary, and will be most effectual in such a case?

Again, a man who, losing all relish for the sweets of divine contemplation, and the exercise of his moral affections, gives himself over to the indulgence of his sensual appetites, who finds his highest happiness in the gratification of his palate, or the excitement of intemperance, or the habits of profligacy,—on such a man, what would have so powerful an effect as the total ruin of his health, and the visitation of an illness which left him neither the capacity nor the wish for his favourite indulgences? God designs that man, also, for eternity; but he lingers around the cisterns of worldly pleasure, in the fond hope of realizing a happiness which he has long waited for in vain: God shatters the cistern, and dashes the cup of pleasure out

of his reluctant hand, that he may no longer deceive himself with the vain hope, but seek to the fountain of living waters which springeth up unto everlasting life. And is not this, also, a benevolent deed,—however painful may be the present disappointment, and however protracted the suffering which it occasions, is it not dictated by the highest wisdom, as the very discipline which is most necessary, and will be most effectual in such a case ?

Again, a man of ardent affections has allowed his heart to be estranged from God, by an undue attachment to his wife, or children, or other relatives and friends. Amiable as his kindness to them appears, yet, if they engross that place in his affection which is due to God only, his heart is not in a right moral state, and his happiness is based on a precarious foundation. God takes away the desire of his eyes by a stroke ; he is stunned by the shock of bereavement ; but, perhaps, even this is not enough ; his affections thus violently severed from one object, may only gather into greater strength, and settle on another ; that other is also smitten and dies ; and it is not till, by such strokes, he is impressed with the vanity of every thing, save the enjoyment of God as his chief good, that the afflicting hand of providence shall be withdrawn from him and his house. Painful, indeed, is the breaking up of a family by bereavement, when death smites one, and then another, of the happy household ; and desolate, indeed, is the heart of him who is thus left alone in a wilderness where roses had encircled his path ; but

they stood betwixt him and God, and it was in mercy and faithfulness that God sent a worm into his gourd, till it withered around him and died.

These illustrations may serve to show, at once, the goodness and the wisdom of God in sending affliction, and adapting the methods of his discipline to the necessities of his people; and they cannot fail to recall to the minds of some, the recollection of many incidents in their past life, which were felt to be very painful, and seemed very dark and mysterious at the time of their occurrence, but to which they can now look back as the very brightest manifestation of the care and kindness of their Redeemer. They may remember a time when the wealth, or pleasures, or business of the world appeared to them robed in attractions to which they were too willing to yield, and threatened to engross the chief place in those affections which God challenges as his own. They may remember some one object, which, more than any other, engaged their eager pursuit, and awakened their deepest interest; and that, for this, they were on the very verge of committing themselves to a course of life, which, if prosecuted with the ardour with which they were about to enter on it, would have long ere now estranged them altogether from God, and ultimately conducted them to perdition. But, just as their affections were gathering around it, and just as they were stretching forth their hand to seize it, that cup of pleasure, or power, or prosperity, was dashed in pieces, and as they wept over its broken fragments, they were taught a lesson which they were

very loath to learn, even that the creature is too frail and perishing to satisfy an immortal soul, and that God would not permit them to seek their happiness in what was unworthy of their nature. If, by these means, they were first *awakened* to a perception of the vanity of the world, and of the infinite magnitude and importance of divine things; if their afflictions were so sanctified as to become the means, in the hand of God, of their *conversion*, then, sure I am, that they cannot fail to look back on the most painful of them all, not only without one sentiment of rebellious regret, but with the deepest emotions of gratitude and of admiration; and they will never cease to regard the discipline of affliction as one of the most powerful instruments of good in the hands of the Redeemer, and one of the most precious privileges of his people. For is it conceivable that it should be otherwise, if, by these means, they have really “had their eyes opened, and have been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto the living God?” With the views which were then, for the first time, opened up to them of the transcendent truths of religion, and which, if they be really converted, they must still cherish with the fondest attachment, they can look back on affliction, and see it in a new and most interesting light,—even as a very thick dark cloud, but a cloud, nevertheless, which has showered down upon them the most precious blessings, and has shed over their souls the freshness and fertility of “a well watered garden, which the Lord hath blessed.”

In their subsequent history, too, they may remember, that just as often as their affections were about to return to the world, when they had begun to *backslide* from God, or were in danger of doing so, just so often did God interpose, by a new stroke of affliction, whereby they were admonished of their danger, and prevented from ruin. They may remember many seasons, when the impressions of religion were almost effaced from their minds, and when “the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” were making gradual but sure encroachments on the sovereignty of that divine principle by which they professed to be animated; and when, although they still retained the belief of immortality, their hearts were beginning to settle down into a contented enjoyment of the world, and little, if at all, animated by the heavenly hopes of the Gospel. In these circumstances, it was needful for their correction, and progress, and comfort, that God should take them into his own hands, and administer such rebukes and chastisements as might wean their affections from the world, and bring them back to himself; and, in such cases, if they will consider the matter attentively, they will find, that the affliction with which they were visited, was the very likeliest and fittest means of accomplishing his gracious design. And what gratitude should they cherish towards God,—what profound admiration of his wisdom,—what unshaken confidence in his faithfulness, when they reflect, that at such seasons, and in such circumstances, his thoughts towards them were

thoughts of love? That when they were doing what they could to provoke him, by manifesting a preference for the creature, and when they had fallen from their first love, he did not, and would not let them forsake him; that, although willing to live at a distance from him, he was determined to bring them near; and, that when, if they had been left to themselves, they would have gone on in a course of declension and discomfort, he did, in confirmation of his holy promise, chasten them, "that they might not be condemned with the world?" And if, at such seasons, the religion which had long lain dormant in their bosoms, and seemed ready to die, was revived and invigorated, and enabled them to bear up under the shock of bereavement, oh! how should they rejoice and be thankful, that the light of religion was made to dawn on their hearts, and that the thick dark cloud was sent to turn their eye again to that light, shining amidst the storm, as the bow of peace and the pledge of safety?

If the believer has thus experienced, even on earth, the blessed effects of affliction, he will the more easily comprehend the import, and believe the truth, of those statements in Scripture, which refer to its ultimate issue and effect, in a future world of perfect holiness and peace. Here, the benefits of affliction, however valuable in themselves, are only partially enjoyed, by reason of the opposition which every holy influence meets with, from the remaining depravity of his heart, and other influences of a contrary nature to which he is exposed, from the contagion of a world that lieth in

wickedness. The iron may be taken from a furnace heated seven times, and beaten with many strokes, but it contains within itself much dross, which prevents the pure ore from being fashioned as it ought, and there plays upon it a cold current which hardens it, even while it is subjected to the artist's stroke. But there, all dross having been removed, and all unfriendly influences excluded, it shall be presented pure and spotless, and remain so for ever. It is in heaven alone that the full benefit of earthly afflictions shall be known and enjoyed. And what can reconcile us to the discipline of affliction, if this reflection will not, that it will terminate in a state of perfect holiness and peace ; and that, meanwhile, it is preparing us for that blessed consummation ?

It will terminate : the period is not far distant when all our sorrows and privations shall come to an end, when death shall bring us to that house where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest ;" and when once the grave "has opened its peaceful bosom to receive us,"* the world, with all its changes and sorrows, can affect our comfort no more. The storm may rage above us, and the whirlwind sweep the solitary churchyard ; the din of civil tumult may arise in the streets ; the war-cry may be raised, and the shock of battle succeed ; the voice of famine may wail around us ; yet no note disturbs the peaceful slumbers of the dead ! But affliction will not terminate merely in the stillness of the tomb ; it will

be succeeded by the bliss of heaven, for which it is even now preparing us, and where, finally and for ever, "the broken heart shall be bound up; the mourner comforted; beauty shall be appointed for ashes, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;" "and God himself shall wipe away all tears from our eyes."

MEDITATION VIII.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION:”

“*Fear not ;*” “*I am he that lieth, and was dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death.*”—REV. I. 17, 18.

THE Bible affords a solid ground of comfort, by the cheering light which it throws over the valley of death, and, across that dark valley, on the fields of immortality beyond it.

To every thoughtful mind, death and the grave will suggest many serious reflections,—reflections which must ever be of a pensive nature, and which, but for the cheering intelligence conveyed by the Gospel, might even induce a feeling of despair. Look to the death-bed of man ; and what do you behold ? An intelligent creature, in the spring of life, when hope is brightest,—or in the prime of manhood, when activity is greatest,—or in the maturity of age, when the fruit of a long experience was ripening for usefulness, laid prostrate by the derangement of some organ or function of

his material frame ; deprived at once, and for ever, of all that hope had anticipated, or activity pursued, or experience gathered, and given over a captive to death, and a prisoner to the grave !

Look to the grave ; and what do you behold ? Multitudes which no man can number, of human bodies, once as vigorous and active as our own, buried in deep forgetfulness, and a prey to corruption and the worm,—nothing remaining to attest their previous existence save a few bones beneath, and, perhaps, some fading epitaph above ! Go into every land, the same scene appears,—however different in climate and scenery, however dissimilar in their institutions and customs, in this, all regions are the same,—every land is the sepulchre of the dead. When musing on the earth as the vast emporium of the dead, who does not feel that the grave is a melancholy scene, and yet a scene in which more than in any other he is personally interested, since it contains a large portion of his dearest kindred, and will soon receive into its bosom his own mortal remains ? Dark, indeed, would be the end of man, were the grave his final resting-place ! and over the wreck of the human family, we might have wept with unavailing anguish, had we not known and heard the Saviour's voice,—“ I am the resurrection and the life ; if any man believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live again.”

The Bible gives us some consoling views of this melancholy theme, in connection with that grand and universal scheme of grace, which gilds with the rays of

peace and hope even the gloomiest prospects of man. It represents death and the grave, and the region of separate spirits, as being under the jurisdiction and superintendence of the same divine person, who, as the Redeemer of men, exercises a sovereign dominion over all the events of the present world. Time, with its events, eternity, with its awful issues, and death, the passage which leads from the one into the other, are all equally under his control ; so that, into whatever state of untried existence any of his people may be brought, they cannot, by any change in their circumstances, be placed beyond the bounds of his jurisdiction, or the reach of his guardian care. Death, which severs them from every other connection, and the grave, which shuts them up from all other help, cannot separate them from his love, nor exclude them from his watchful eye ; for he presides over death not less than over life,—to him the sepulchres of the dead are as accessible as the abodes of the living ; and go where they may, after death he meets with them, and cares for them in the state of disembodied spirits, and will ultimately bring them into the general assembly of the just in heaven. Both worlds are equally subject to his authority, and the dark pathway betwixt the one and the other is also under his special care ; so that, whether we live in the body, it is because he sustains us, or whether we die, it is because he summons us, or whether we enter into the invisible world, it is because he admits us ; and every where, and at all times, on earth, or in the grave, or in the separate state, we are

equally under the protection of One who, possessed of infinite power, unerring wisdom, and unquenchable love, will order all things that concern us, so as to fulfil his own gracious purpose in dying for our redemption, and to promote our present progress and our eternal perfection in holiness and peace.

These views are strikingly presented in the sublime exordium to the book of the Apocalypse, where, appearing to the beloved disciple in the august, yet amiable character of God-man, the Redeemer declares, "I am he that liveth, and was dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death." Every clause of this sublime declaration, coming as it does from our glorified Redeemer, is pregnant with assurance and consolation to his believing people, and is specially fitted to banish those fearful and anxious forebodings which oppress their minds in the prospect of dissolution.

"*I am he that liveth,*" or rather, "I am THE LIVING ONE," the first and the last, without beginning of days or end of years, self-existent, and therefore, independent of every outward condition, and incapable of change. He asserts his supreme divinity as a reason why his disciples should "*not fear ;*" and, surely, to every Christian mind, the fact, that the Son of Man, in whom they have trusted as their Saviour, is "the Living One," may well furnish a ground of unshaken confidence, since it assures us, that, happen what may, our trust is reposed on one, whose existence,

and whose power to affect our welfare, cannot be destroyed by any event whatever, and that our interests for eternity are absolutely safe, being placed in his hands.

But how much greater ought to be our confidence in him, and how much sweeter the consolation which his words impart, when he adds, "I WAS DEAD." He appears to the apostle not simply as "the Living One," the self-existent Son of God, but as God manifested in the flesh, the Son of God in human nature, and even in his glorified state, "like unto the Son of Man," whom the beloved disciple had oftentimes seen and followed as the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Let us attempt to conceive of the feelings with which the beloved disciple must have looked on his glorified Master; let us remember that he had companied with him on earth, that he had leaned upon his bosom, and that he knew the sad history of his crucifixion, and we cannot fail to perceive how the mere fact, that the same divine Redeemer now stood before him, and spoke with him of the decease which he had accomplished at Jerusalem, must have served to annihilate in the mind of the apostle the fear of death, and to open up to his view such a glorious prospect into the invisible world, as would strip the pathway that led to heaven of its terrors, however dark and dismal it might otherwise be.

And to every Christian, the words of our Lord,—
"I was dead," will suggest reflections that should serve

to fortify the mind against the fear of dissolution ; or, at all events, to rebuke and mitigate the aversion with which it is usually contemplated.

Did the Redeemer die,—a Being who claims to himself the dignity of “the Living One,”—a Being not only of infinite dignity, but of spotless purity, and who, from the beginning till the end of his existence on earth, was the object of God’s supreme complacency and approbation ? And shall we complain that death is allotted as our portion also ? *we*, who, as created beings, are insignificant,—by inheritance, mortal,—by actual guilt, polluted and debased ? To us, death comes as wages earned by guilt ; but even were it otherwise,—did death come to us as an accident of our being, how should we complain of the hardness of our lot, when Christ himself declares, “I was dead ?”

Did the Redeemer die,—he in whose sympathy and care we are commanded to confide, and to whom we are taught to look, in every hour of danger or distress, for needful succour and consolation ? And is it no encouragement to reflect, that he, into whose hands we commit our case, when in the extremity of mortal agony, and when vain is the help of man, has himself drank the cup before us and felt its bitterness,—that every inch of that dark valley was trod by him, and that, from his own experience, he knows what strength and succour we need in that dreadful hour ?

Did the Redeemer die,—as the surety and representative of sinners ; was his death a solemn expiation of our guilt, and an adequate satisfaction to God for

the penalty which we had incurred? Is there no reason, then, to suppose, that dying, as he did, in the room and on behalf of the guilty, death met him in a more formidable shape, and put into his hands a bitterer cup than can now fall to the lot of any of his people; and that their dissolution will be greatly less terrible than it would have been by reason of his enduring in their room the heaviest part of it? For what is it that mainly embitters death, and surrounds it, even when viewed at a distance, with innumerable terrors? Not surely the mere pain with which it is accompanied,—for equal or greater pain we have often endured—not the mere dissolution of the tie betwixt soul and body,—for if that were all, however our sensitive nature might shrink from the shock, our rational nature might enable us to regard it with composure,—not the mere separation from the society and business of the present world,—for that, however it may awaken a feeling of melancholy regret, can hardly account for the forebodings and terrors of which every mind is more or less conscious when it contemplates death. No; it is something more than the mere pain of dying, or the mere dissolving of the elements of our being, or the mere separation from this world, that embitters the cup of death. “The sting of death is sin,”—the same sin which gave us over as a prey to death, makes us also slaves to the fear of death; for, by the unvarying law of conscience, sin and fear are bound up together; and it is a conscience burdened with guilt, and apprehensive of punishment, which, in our case, arrays

death with terrors unknown to the inferior and irresponsible creation. But Christ died to expiate and cancel the guilt of his people ; he has already endured, and by enduring, has taken away the penalty of their transgression ; death remains, but its sting is taken away ; so that we may “ thank God, who hath given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord,” and may exclaim with the apostle, “ Oh ! death where is now thy sting,—Oh ! grave, where is thy victory ? ”

Did the Redeemer die,—that he might show us an example of suffering affliction with patience, and be to us a pattern of faith and hope in our last extremity ? And is there no consolation in the thought, that when we reach the shore of that dark water which divides time and eternity, we can fix our eye on one who, for our sakes, crossed it in triumph before us ; and think of the love of our Redeemer, who, in compassion to our fears, became “ bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,” that, by his own example, he might teach us how to die ? Had he returned from earth to heaven in triumph ; had he avoided the dark valley himself, and, summoning his legions of angels, left the world by a direct ascension to glory, then, whatever lessons he might have taught, and whatever commands and encouragements he might have addressed to his followers, respecting their conduct in that last hour of darkness and distress, his instructions would have had little effect in comparison with the charm of his example, when, placing himself in their circumstances, and submitting to their fate, he “ bowed his head and

gave up the ghost ;” and met death, as he commands his people to meet it, in the exercise of an unshaken confidence in God, and humble submission to his will. Where shall we find such another example of holy fortitude for our imitation ? where such another instance of success for our encouragement ?

Did the Redeemer die,—that he might not only deprive death of its sting, but overcome him that had the power of death, and take it into his own hands ? Let us, then, rejoice in his success ; for once Satan had the power of death, but Christ hath “carried captivity captive,” and “Satan hath fallen before him as lightning from heaven.” In that hour, which he did himself emphatically call “the hour and the power of darkness,” when he was in more than mortal agony, travailing in the greatness of his strength, he vanquished death and hell, and he wrested from the hands of our greatest enemy, and took into his own possession, the keys of death and of the invisible world. Death still reigns, but Christ has now the dominion over death.

In token of his victory, the Redeemer adds, “I AM ALIVE FOR EVERMORE.” The grave received, but it could not retain him ; and while the fact of his interment may well serve to reconcile us to the peaceful grave, with all its loneliness and darkness, since it was embalmed by the presence of our Lord himself, the fact of his resurrection from the grave should enkindle the bright hope of a glorious morning, after that dark night has passed away.

For, did the Redeemer arise from the tomb? Then here, at least, is *one* example of restoration to life after the agony of death was past,—one case in which the spell of death was broken, and the cerements of the tomb burst, and the power of Satan vanquished,—one living monument of the immortality of man,—one incontestible proof, that the same body which died, and the same spirit which departed, may meet again after that fearful separation. Christ hath risen, and in his resurrection we find the ground of an eternal hope.

Did the Redeemer arise from the grave in the same character in which he died,—as the head and representative of his people? Then is his resurrection not only the proof, but the pledge; not only the evidence, but the earnest of our own. For if the head be risen, shall not the members of his body rise also? If, as our representative, he hath passed into the heavens, shall not we, in whose name, and for whose behoof, he undertook and accomplished his mediatorial work, follow him in our order and time? Did we die with him, and shall we not rise with him? “If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” “If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.” “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

Did the Redeemer not only rise from the grave, but does he **LIVE FOR EVERMORE**? Is he the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? Not only eternal in his being, but unchangeable in his character, as our Redeemer? What, then, should cause us to despond, or

make us afraid? or “what shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Since Christ hath died, yea, also, and hath risen again, and is now and for ever at the right hand of God, “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall separate us from his love.” True, we know not what may yet befall us, nor into what untried circumstances, or state of being, we may hereafter be brought; we are sure that one day we must die and enter the invisible world; and we may well be concerned for an event which will have an everlasting issue for good or for evil; but placing our trust in the efficacy of the Redeemer’s death, and believing in the fact of his resurrection, we may take his own word as the rock of our confidence and hope,—“I am alive for evermore, Amen;” and “because I live, ye shall live also.”

If these views of the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord are fitted to banish, or mitigate, the fear of dissolution, and to inspire the hope of a glorious immortality, how much should their impression be aided by the sublime statement in the last clause of the passage,—“I HAVE THE KEYS OF HELL AND OF DEATH!”

The power of the keys is an absolute power,—a royal prerogative. Christ’s authority is not confined to the visible Church on earth; it extends to the invisible world, and embraces under its jurisdiction all the disembodied spirits, of whatsoever character:

although they have left this world, they are still under the dominion of him, of whom it is said, that "at his name every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, of things on earth, and of things under the earth; and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is *as the Redeemer*, that he asserts his claim to the keys; that claim is founded on the fact, that "he overcame death and him that had the power of death, in order to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage;" and it is expressly declared by the apostle, that, "for this end, Christ both died and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

That he is the *Lord of the dead*, is here asserted—"I have the keys of hell." In the original there are two terms, each of which is rendered by the word "hell" in the English version; the one, however, literally imports the invisible world at large, while the other denotes that department of the invisible world which is specially appropriated to the punishment of the wicked. In the passage before us, the more comprehensive term is used; and here, as elsewhere, it is to be regarded as signifying not merely the place of future punishment, although that is unquestionably included in it, but, more generally, the world of spirits, the entire state of retribution, whether of reward or punishment. We learn from Scripture, that the whole of that vast world is divided into two departments, and only two—heaven and hell; and

that betwixt the two, a great gulph is fixed,—an impassable gulph of separation : but separated as they are, Christ reigns over both ; and when he says, “ I have the keys of the invisible world,” he asserts his dominion over all the spirits that have ever passed from this world, either into heaven or hell ; and his absolute control over them in their final destination of happiness or woe.

When it is affirmed, that he has also “ the key of death,” it is plainly implied that no spirit can pass out of this present world without his permission or appointment ; and, more generally, that he is lord of the living not less than of the dead, * and has a thorough control over every thing that can in any way affect the lives of men. An absolute power over death necessarily presupposes a corresponding power over life and its affairs ; and it is by the exercise of his providence in sustaining life, that he fulfils his purpose as to the time and mode of their departure hence.

So that, combining these several views, we arrive at this grand and comprehensive result, that the Redeemer is possessed of absolute power over the course of our lives on earth, over the time and manner of our departure out of the world, and over that invisible state, in each of its great departments, on which our spirits enter when they quit their mortal tabernacles ; and this noble testimony to the universal power and everlasting

* See Howe's Redeemer's Dominion over the Invisible World.

presence of Christ with his disciples, is fitted to suggest several reflections, which may be useful in dissipating their anxieties, and in fortifying their courage, when they contemplate either the future course of their pilgrimage here, or the solemn prospect of its termination, or the still more solemn, because untried and eternal, state on which they shall enter hereafter.

Has the Redeemer the *keys of death*? Then this consideration ought to relieve our minds both of the anxieties and the regrets which we are too apt to feel, in reference to the changes of the present life.

It should mitigate the anxiety which often preys upon the mind when we look forward into futurity, and contemplate the *prospect of our own dissolution*. We should remember, that as the Redeemer alone hath the keys of death, nothing can happen to send us forth from the world before the time which he has appointed for our departure. Neither man nor devils can abridge the term of probation assigned to us by our gracious Master; nor, until he is pleased to call us away, shall any power on earth or in hell prevail against us; no accident, no hostile violence, no insidious snare, no dark conspiracy, can touch our life, but by his command. And surely, when we reflect on the numerous dangers to which human life is, in its greatest security, exposed,—the frailty of our frame,—the diseases to which it is subject,—our constant exposure to fatal accidents, and the malice of open or concealed enemies, it must be consolatory to know, that the key of death is in the Saviour's hands, and

that, come what may, we cannot be forced out of the world, till he open the door and bid us depart.

More especially, when we are visited with disease, and threatened with a speedy termination of life, the Saviour's power over the keys of death should repress or assuage those violent anxieties as to the probability of death or of recovery, and those disquieting speculations as to the issue of disease, and the mode of its treatment, in which we are too apt to indulge to an extent which unfits the mind for the serious exercises of religion, appropriate to a season of personal affliction. Who has not felt in the hours of languishing and sickness, that these painful and perplexing thoughts were even more harassing to his mind, than the pressure of disease itself, and that they diverted his attention, in a great measure, from the profitable contemplation of divine things? Now, besides that they are injurious, as tending to divert the mind from what is certain, to what must necessarily be uncertain until the event shall disclose it,—and useless, as being incapable of either ascertaining or altering the future issue, it is our privilege, as Christians, to know that such anxieties are altogether groundless; for disease cannot kill, nor medicine cure, without the appointment of Him who holds in his own hands the keys of life and of death; and if he hath fixed the issue of this disease, why should we be anxious? If death be in the cup, that cup has been put into our hands at the time fixed by unerring wisdom and infinite love; and if the door of death be opening for our departure, it is because the

Saviour, in whom we trust, is summoning us away. Shall we, then, rebel against his appointment? shall we doubt the wisdom of his determination? or, ignorant as we are of what is before us in this world, and of what really concerns our best interests, can we entertain the wish, that the power of determining the time of our death were wrested out of his hands and placed in our own? True, we may have many ties that attach us to this world; we may be young, and, with the sanguine hope of youth, may cleave to life; we may be prosperous, and surrounded with many comforts; we may have a young and engaging family, whom we are loath to leave behind us to the cold charities of the world; we may have many dependents on our industry or bounty, who will bitterly lament our loss; but do we imagine that these considerations are not known to the Redeemer, or that he has not weighed them all? and if, notwithstanding, it be his will to summon us, are we not prepared to yield up our judgment to *his*?

The same consideration should prevent or repress the anxiety which is too often felt respecting the *mode* and *circumstances* of our dissolution, not less than respecting the time of its occurrence. A pensive mind is apt to be oppressed with melancholy forebodings as to the situation in which death may overtake it, and to muse on the thousand possibilities which fancy may conjure up in the darkness of the future, till it is overwhelmed with anxieties of its own creation. We know as little of the *mode* as we do of the *time* of our de-

parture hence ; it may be that we shall quit the world with ease or with difficulty, by a sudden stroke, or by protracted suffering ; we may be, at the time, vividly conscious, or in a state of partial aberration, or totally insensible ; we may die alone, or in the midst of friends ; by sea or by land ; at home or abroad ; on the highway, or in the solitary desert, or on our own pillow. These possibilities are apt to be converted, by a melancholy temperament, into the food of anxious disquietude and fretting care. It is a very obvious consideration, that such anxieties, springing, as they do, from all possible forms of dissolution, must, for the greater part, be groundless, as death can only meet us in one form at last ; and that, even in reference to that form, in respect of which they may be well-founded, they are totally useless, as being of no avail to avert or alter it ; that such persons harass themselves respecting a matter which must be totally unknown, and which, were it known, is, nevertheless, beyond their control ; that their present fears respecting it occasion a greater and more protracted suffering than the event itself could occasion, did it really occur in its most formidable shape ; that fear is, in its very nature, an anticipation, and, in some measure, a foretaste of *all possible evils*, whereas in death, *one* form of that evil only is endured ; and that such anxieties have the effect of spreading death, as it were, over the whole extent of life, according to the beautiful language of the apostle, when he speaks of some “ who through the fear of death, are *all their lifetime* subject to bondage.”

But, without dwelling on these obvious considerations, what matters it, after all, where, or in what circumstances we die? Die where we may, we cannot be beyond the reach of the Redeemer's protection,—nay, the fact that he has in his own hand the key of death, is a proof that he is present with us, and that he is thinking of us, in what place, and at what time soever death may overtake us; for *there*, where we die, *he* summons us; and it is ours to be ready and willing to depart at his call.

This consideration should repress, not only the anxieties which we feel in regard to the future, but also the regrets which we are too apt to cherish respecting the *bereavements* with which we have already been visited. It is not less instructive and consoling, when viewed, in reference to the death of relatives and friends, than when it is considered in respect to our own prospect of dissolution. For it teaches us, that the duration of each man's existence here is determined by the Redeemer; that it belongs to him to appoint a longer or shorter period to each, as he will; and in doing so, we have reason to be satisfied, that he determines according to the dictates of infallible wisdom, although the reasons of his procedure must necessarily be to us, for the present, inscrutable. We cannot tell why one is removed in infancy, another in boyhood, a third in the prime of manly vigour, and a fourth reserved to the period of old age; and, above all, why the most promising in talent and character, and the most useful in their several stations, are

taken away, while others of inferior worth are often left behind ; but suffice it for us, that this happens not by chance, neither is it the result of caprice or carelessness, but flows from that unerring wisdom, whose counsels are formed on a view of all possible relations and consequences, whether as to the visible or invisible, the present or the future states of being. The power of death being in the hands of the Redeemer, the duration of human life is, in every instance, determined by him ; and none, therefore, ought to entertain the thought, either that death is, in one case, unduly *premature*, or, in another, unduly *delayed*. None live, either for a longer or for a shorter period than infinite wisdom has assigned to them ; and as reason teaches, that to his appointment we must submit, however unwilling, it being irresistible, and far beyond our control,—so, as Christians, we should learn to acquiesce in it cheerfully, as the appointment of one who cannot err. That the determined hour had arrived, is a reflection that should serve to banish every useless regret,—but that this hour was fixed by one in whose wisdom we confide, and of whose interest in our welfare we have the strongest assurance, is a thought which should not only induce resignation, but inspire comfort and peace.

For, when death does seize any of our friends, whether in the ordinary course of disease and decay, or by violence or accident, how consolatory to the mourning relatives is the thought, that it came at the bidding of the Saviour, and that it has not arrived

without his sanction and appointment ! Otherwise, we might be apt to reflect, with unavailing regret, on certain needless exposures that might have been avoided, certain remedies whose virtues might have been tried, certain names high in professional reputation, who might have been consulted ; or to dwell, with painful self-reproach, on certain accidents that might have been prevented, and injuries which timely care might have cured. The mind will often busy itself with such reflections after the loss of a near and dear friend ; but the very intensity of feeling which is thus called forth, is a sufficient proof that any carelessness or negligence that may have been manifested, was far, very far, from being designed or wilful. And although, where criminal negligence has been shown, no doctrine, however consolatory, can prevent regret, or *should* repress feelings of penitential sorrow ; yet, in other cases, where the heart bears witness to its own interest in the beloved object, the doctrine of Christ's absolute command over the keys of death, and the consideration that our friend was summoned away by a deliberate act of his sovereign wisdom, may well assuage the grief which such reflections on the commencement, progress, and treatment of the disease, are wont to awaken in the most sensitive and affectionate minds.

While this sublime statement should banish, or at least mitigate, the anxieties and regrets which we sometimes experience, in reference to the events of the present life, inasmuch as Christ's power over death

implies a corresponding power over life and its affairs, it is equally fitted to fortify our minds for the last struggle of nature, since it assures us that Christ will *then be present with us*. In the very article of death, it gives us comfort. For, hath the Redeemer the keys of death? Then he presides over that dark passage which leads from this world to the next; his power does not terminate with our present life; it extends from the world which is smiling in the cheerful light of day, to that mysterious passage which lies amidst the sepulchres of the dead, and which, to our imperfect vision, is shrouded in impenetrable darkness. We know not the secrets of that passage. We cannot know what it is to die. The mind may then have views and feelings of which it is impossible for us at present to form any conception; for who shall attempt to describe what may be passing in the soul when the tie that binds it to the body is breaking, and nature is undergoing dissolution? And what renders that scene still more awful is, that *we die alone*,—alone we enter on the dark valley. Friends and family may stand around our couch, and watch the progress of dissolution; but they cannot accompany us, neither are they sensible of what we feel, nor able in any way to help or deliver us. The spirit departs alone; and in that awful hour of separation from human fellowship,—in that solitude of death, when, placed on the verge of the invisible world, we know that all behind must be forsaken, and are ignorant of what may meet us as we advance, oh! how consolatory to reflect, that death

itself is subject to the Redeemer's power,—that he watches over the dissolution of his people, and keeps his eye, not only on the busy scenes of life, but also on the secret mysteries of death. Yes, "*precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*" There he is, where most we need a friend and comforter, standing at the gate of death, with absolute power over every enemy that can assail us, and with unquenchable zeal for our welfare. Dark, then, as the passage is, and unknown as are its dangers and pains, surely we may venture to commit ourselves into his hands, and to say with the Psalmist, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for *thou art with me*; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me;" for, says the Apostle, "all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life,—or death."

But Christ hath also the keys of the invisible world at large; none can enter there without his permission, and all, without exception, are under his control. His kingdom on earth is but a small dependency, compared with his universal dominion in the invisible state, where already are congregated, of the human race, ten thousand times ten thousand more than are any where to be found on the earth's surface, besides the hosts of spiritual beings of whom we read in Scripture, as angels, elect or fallen, archangels, principalities, dominions and powers. Not one human spirit that ever lived on the earth's surface has been extinguished,—they are all at this moment alive in one or

other department of the invisible world, and, holy or unholy, happy or wretched, they are under the dominion of our Saviour; and under the same dominion are placed all higher intelligences, fallen or unfallen, of what rank and in what station soever they may be. Could we form an estimate of the multitude of human spirits which must have passed into that vast region from our own world since the period of its creation,—of the countless millions which every province of the earth, and every island of the sea, have yielded to swell the host of departed spirits,—and could we, moreover, form any conception of the different orders of beings, purely spiritual, and the multitudes belonging to every order, together with their respective rank, and dignity, and power,—could we conceive of the extent of that world, which is at once described as heaven, the third heavens, and yet as stretching far above all heavens,—then might we have some materials for forming an estimate of the grandeur and extent of the Redeemer's kingdom; but, unable as we are to comprehend a theme so vast in itself, and of which only a few glimpses are revealed in Scripture, surely it is consolatory to reflect, that whatever may be the extent of the invisible world,—whatever the number, the rank, and the character of the various orders of its inhabitants, the whole of that vast region, and all these innumerable hosts, are under the dominion of him who was “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,” and who, as our Redeemer, has identified our interests with his own, by “dying for

our sins, and rising again for our justification," and who is even now "at the right hand of God, making intercession *for us*." When we come to enter on that world over which he presides, what reflection could so well support the mind in the prospect of such a destination as this, that, go where we may, we are still under the watchful eye of one who has given us the strongest assurances of his love? And may we not well believe, that, if we have trusted in him without being disappointed, while we sojourned in this remote province of his empire, much more may we trust in his care, when we enter that invisible world where he is, and over which he reigns in the full manifestation of his mediatorial power and glory?

As Christ has the key of the invisible world at large, so hath he the key of each ward or department—the keys of heaven and of hell.

Hath he the key of hell? Then, knowing as we do, that there are rebellious spirits of great subtlety, and power, and malice, and that they are sometimes permitted to go about as roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour, we might have many an anxious fear, lest, in the dark hour of death, some such should be watching for the spirit, when it ventures alone into the invisible world; but "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints,"—to that death-bed the watchful eye of the Saviour is directed; he can and will restrain the malice of our enemies; and his promise is, that "whoso believeth on him shall never

come into condemnation," and that "none shall pluck them out of his Father's hand."

And hath the Redeemer the keys of heaven,—that blessed asylum of purity and peace, where, in the midst of his redeemed, the Saviour himself dwells? Then, in the hands of our best friend, one who is pledged to us by the sacredness of his word, and by the shedding of his own blood, in his hands is the power of admitting us;—and will he shut the door against us?—he who, for the opening of that door, descended from heaven to earth, and whose prayer was and is, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory?" No; the door of heaven is thrown open for the reception of his penitent and believing people. Even now is he "preparing a place for them in his Father's house, where there are many mansions;" and thus will he receive and welcome them, on their departure hence, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, *inherit* the kingdom *prepared for you*,"—"well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

MEDITATION IX.

Ps. cxix. 50.—“ THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION : ”

“ *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God.* ”—REV. vii. 13–15.

WHEN a thoughtful man considers the history of this world, from the creation downward to the present time, and reflects on the thousand successive generations of our race which have been born, and which have lived, and passed away,—when he traces in the page of history the revolutions and wars, the schemes and enterprises, the discoveries in art and science, which mark its epochs, and considers that all the busy spirits which then thought, and felt, and acted, with so much intensity and interest, have long since been laid to rest,—when he looks to the sepulchres in every land, where all nations and tribes are entombed; and, above all,

when he thinks of the multitude that have been carried, one after another, from his own neighbourhood to the grave, and that it now contains many of the members of his own family,—all whom, in their age, he was wont in his youth to revere, and many whom, in their childhood, he knew and loved ; he can hardly fail to be struck by the thought, that he is more nearly related to the departed than to the living ; that the earth contains, within its bars, a much larger number of men than it bears on its surface ; and that, while it is the abode of the living, it is, in a larger sense, the depository of the dead.

Can a mind of any reflective power stop short at this melancholy point ; or will it not entertain the question,—What is the state of the mighty congregation which lies below ? What has become of those living and active spirits which once appeared on the arena of public affairs, and set the world in motion ; or which, in the more quiet and secluded walks of humble life, awakened the interest of the domestic circle, and a small neighbourhood of friends ? Are these spirits still alive ? Are they in a state of conscious existence ? and, if they be, in what part of God's universe, and in what circumstances, are they now placed ?

The Bible answers these solemn questions. It declares, that not one spirit which has ever lived and acted on the earth has been extinguished ; that every one is still somewhere conscious of its existence, and sensible of its state. From the death of Abel, when

the first human spirit passed into eternity, down to the present moment, when others are disappearing from the midst of us, has that state been fast peopling from this earth. And what a multitude, then, of human beings must be there,—the collective contributions of all ages to eternity, and of all lands to heaven or hell!

For wise reasons, that thickly peopled scene is to us invisible. Were it disclosed to our sight, instead of being revealed to our faith, it might derange the whole economy of our present state of probation, and interfere with the operation of those principles by which the characters of men are now tried, and according to which they will hereafter be judged. But God has made known to us, by evidence sufficient to command rational assent, the fact that such a state of being exists, and is to be expected hereafter. He has farther informed us, that it is divided into two departments, which are separated from each other by a great gulph, and that into one or other of these departments—into heaven or hell, every human spirit is admitted, according to its improvement or neglect of privileges on earth,—according to the state of its character at the hour of death.

At present, we are called to contemplate the inhabitants of heaven,—the few that have been saved in every age, already swelled into a multitude which no man can number, and yet to receive, from amongst ourselves and our children, an accession to their blessed society. The curtain which veils the invisible world from our sight is here drawn aside, and an innumer-

able multitude of holy and happy spirits, once tried like as we now are, are seen clothed in white robes, and, with palms in their hands, “singing the song of God and of the Lamb.”

The words of the elder, in describing these blessed inhabitants of heaven, refer, first of all, to *their past history*; and this affords matter of comfortable and instructive meditation. Their past history *connects them intimately with ourselves*, for they were all *sufferers*: “These are they that came out of great tribulation.” They constitute, therefore, a peculiar class in heaven. The angels and seraphim have had no personal experience of sorrow, but these human spirits have tasted its bitterness. This must needs give a distinctive aspect to their class, and a peculiar tone to their feelings for ever; for herein they stand distinguished from all other orders of being in the upper sanctuary, that they were once a suffering people. In this respect, too, while they are dissimilar to angels, all the redeemed are like one another! Kings are there, and peasants are there also; but each has entered heaven through much tribulation, and there is not one of them that may not sympathise with every other, in reflecting on the past, as in enjoying the present. Some of these blessed spirits were once in abject poverty, and their whole life was one continual struggle against want; some were lodged in a weak and sickly frame, or subject to painful paroxysms of disease, which rendered life a burden; others were the objects of cruel mockery and persecution, and “had

trial of bonds and imprisonments ;” and being “ destitute, afflicted, tormented, they wandered in deserts and on mountains, in dens and caves of the earth ;” and all shared in the more common sorrows of life—strong temptation, frequent disappointments, painful bereavements, and finally, the agonies of death. Yet *there* they are in heaven. Tried like ourselves—like us oftentimes weary, beset by evil, by fear distracted, and ready at times to give up the struggle in despair, they were enabled to persevere ; and “ being found faithful unto death, they have received the crown of life.”

To the tribulations of the redeemed, the elder refers as an important feature in their past history,—a fact so important that it was worthy of being noticed in connection with the weight of glory which they now enjoy. And that it is so will appear from the following reasons :—

Their tribulations on earth must *sweeten* to them the rest and peace of heaven. The happiness of that state is frequently denoted by *relative* terms, such as rest, which implies previous labour ; and victory, which implies conflict ;—and such terms suggest the contrast betwixt their previous and their present state, by which the blessedness of the latter is enhanced. Never is rest more sweet than when it comes after fatigue, nor peace than after the toils of battle, nor safety than after the hour of apprehended danger. Now, here the weary traveller has reached his destination, the tempest-tost mariner has entered his quiet haven ; the danger is past, the warfare is ended, and their long

looked for home is only the more sweet, by reason of the numerous pains, and perils, and privations, which they endured by the way. In any case, the contrast betwixt earth and heaven must be great; even in the case of a king the transition is a glorious one; but in some cases of severe affliction and protracted suffering, the change is, to our imperfect vision, more apparently great. Lazarus, old, diseased, and a beggar, was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; and must not his poverty and privations on earth have aided, by the force of contrast, the happiness of heaven?

These tribulations are an important feature in the history of the redeemed; because, while they now serve to sweeten the rest and peace of heaven, they were also a principal means, in the hand of God, of *preparing them*, in point of character, for its enjoyment. Not only by the natural effect of contrast does sorrow enliven succeeding happiness, but by sorrow as a means of moral discipline, concurring with other means graciously vouchsafed, did God first lead them to turn to himself, and break up their fond attachment to earthly things, and woo their desires and affections towards heaven; and by the same discipline of sorrow, continued as need required after their conversion, did he from time to time revive their heavenly hopes, and check their backslidings, and stimulate them onwards in the path of preparation, till they were made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." The beneficial effect of affliction in preparing them for glory, is often referred to in the Sacred Writings; it is ex-

pressly declared that, "though at present not joyous, but grievous, their tribulations work out for them a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory;" and this they do, by "making them partakers of God's holiness." In so far as they conduced to this blessed consummation, they were worthy of being mentioned as an important as well as interesting feature in their past history, in connection with the blessedness of their present state; and doubtless, were the company of the redeemed to give utterance to their feelings, they still might, even amidst the glories of heaven, exclaim like the believer on earth, "It was good for us that we were afflicted; for before we were afflicted we went astray, but now we keep thy law."

And as, in the experience of those who are already before the throne on high, tribulation has sweetened the blessedness of heaven, even as it brought them to seek, and prepared them to enjoy it, so, surely, to us who are still in the vale of tears, no scene could well be more appropriately presented for our encouragement in every difficulty, and our comfort under every sorrow, than that, in which they who once suffered as we now suffer, and laboured as we are called to labour, are beheld victorious over every enemy, delivered from every evil, and only the more blessed and the more happy, in proportion as their trials on earth were protracted and severe. Were it a company of angels, who never suffered, that appeared in this sublime vision, the encouragement to us were less, in proportion to the contrast betwixt their history and our own; but when

the spirits of departed men,—the inhabitants of the same world, the partakers of the same nature, the sharers of the same trials with ourselves, are presented before us, arrayed in white robes, and with palms of victory in their hands, well may we thank God and take courage, assured, through their example, that “our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”

From their sufferings it necessarily follows, and it is obviously presupposed in the succeeding clause, that *they were sinners*. This, also, is an important and a distinctive feature in their past history. Unlike the angels of God, they were naturally depraved. Their affections were once entirely estranged from God and his service. Religion was once to them as revolting as to others; and, perhaps, many of them lapsed, for a time, into infidel opinions, and questioned the existence of God, and doubted of their own immortality, and discarded alike the hope of heaven and the fear of hell! Nor did their depravity appear only in the disordered state of their moral feelings, or in their tendency to unbelief; it was manifested in practical disobedience to God, wherein soever his will was contrary to their own in acts of intemperance, or dishonesty, or uncleanness; in the neglect of important duty, or in the commission of known and positive sin.

Yes, all these glorious and happy spirits were once in this guilty and depraved condition; and whatever of purity they now possess, was acquired by a painful struggle against the tendencies of their fallen nature. Every one of them, in looking back on their history

while they lived in this world, may recollect a time when they were estranged from God, careless of his favour, and disobedient to his will ; and these recollections, while they must fill them with profound humility, will also enhance, in their esteem, the magnitude and blessedness of that salvation which they now enjoy, and deepen the gratitude with which they celebrate its triumphant consummation. And were these glorious spirits once, like us, depraved and guilty, liable to the same temptations, agitated by the same passions, and opposed by the same difficulties with ourselves ? Let *us* thank God, and from their example take courage ; for, guilty as we are, some once not less guilty are now in heaven : if we are depraved, they were depraved also ; if we feel every motion towards holiness to be a painful struggle against our nature, they felt the same ; if we have reason to complain of the hardness of our hearts, and the instability of our purposes, and the frequency of our backslidings, they had the same occasion to mourn over theirs ; and their sins, their backslidings, their penitential acknowledgments, their bitter complaints, their painful struggles, together with their final triumph over all, are recorded, and may well serve for the purpose, of encouraging *us* to persevere in the same path, which, however arduous, and however painful it may be, will conduct us, as it conducted them, to a scene of perfect purity and everlasting repose.

They were sinful, but—"they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Being guilty and depraved, they had neither the inclination to forsake sin, nor the means of expiating it; and as by the law of their moral nature, and the external arrangements of God's government, sin was inseparably connected with suffering, they had no present enjoyment which could deserve the name of happiness, and the future offered nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment. Nor was it consistent with the principles of the divine government, or, at all events, with the purposes of the divine mind, to forgive sin, or to exempt sinners from suffering in any way which should have the effect of annulling the sanctions of the law, or which might even seem to dispense with its authority. But, while they were thus degraded and helpless, by a glorious device of divine wisdom and love, their sins were imputed to a substitute, by whom the penalty of the law was endured, and its requirements fulfilled, in their room, and on their account; and the law being honoured and magnified by his obedience unto death, his sufferings were accepted as a propitiation for their sins; and through faith in his blood, the guilty were invited to draw near to God as a merciful and forgiving father, and assured that they should receive mercy to pardon, and grace to help in the time of need. It was declared that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;" and all, without exception, were invited to wash and be clean. A "fountain having thus been opened in the house of Judah for sin and for uncleanness," they who, convinced of their guilt and misery, repaired to it in the

exercise of faith in the divine promise, are said to “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

The effect of that blood, when savingly applied to the conscience, was twofold ; it expiated and took away the guilt of past sins, whereby they were obnoxious to divine wrath ; and it had also a *moral effect* in deadening their corruption, and renewing and sanctifying their characters. Its legal efficacy in the way of procuring the pardon of sin is declared, when the apostle at one time asserts, that “without the shedding of blood is no remission,” and at another, “that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot,”—“blood shed for the remission of sins ;” and its *moral* efficacy, in renewing the character and promoting the sanctification of believers is asserted, when the apostle asks, how “much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ?”

We learn from Scripture, that wherever that blood has been effectual for these ends, it was savingly applied to the conscience by the Holy Ghost,—and this he did by working faith in their hearts. As the blood of Christ was the objective ground, so faith was the subjective means of their salvation. The Holy Spirit acted, as in every case he does act, in a way suited to their rational nature ; by convincing them, in the first instance, of their sin and danger, he impressed them with a sense of their need of salvation ; by enlighten-

ing their minds, he enabled them to perceive the excellency and suitableness of that salvation which was revealed and offered to them in the Gospel ; and by renewing their wills, he persuaded them to embrace it, and to appropriate it to themselves in the exercise of a simple faith. That faith, as it is the fruit of a divine and saving change, so is it the spring both of peace and of purity ; and wherever it exists, it is ever found both to procure pardon, and to promote sanctification. No sooner, therefore, were they led by the Spirit to apprehend the necessity, and to aim at the attainment of salvation, in the way of God's appointment, than they were totally changed, both in their state and character, and they found that the blood of Christ served both to wash away the guilt of their lives, and the pollution of their nature. Their guilt was taken away, and their characters were renewed, at the same time, and by the same means ; and hence, when it is intimated that "they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," we are to understand that they had undergone that radical change which is denoted by the term conversion, and had, in consequence, been not only "justified," but also "sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

The blood of Christ, shed for the remission of sins, was the sole ground of their acceptance ; that blood, sprinkled on their consciences, was the means of purging them from dead works to serve the living God ; and to the efficacy of that blood are to be ascribed, not

only all the peace and holiness which they acquired on earth, but also their exaltation to glory and their blessedness in heaven. This is strongly intimated in the word "*therefore*:" "Therefore are they now before the throne of God." They did not rise to glory on the ground of their own merit, or by the strength of their own virtue; on the contrary, they were, like ourselves, "guilty, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" but feeling their own guilt and danger, they repaired to the cross of Christ, and in his blood, a propitiation for sin, and a ground of hope was presented, on which they reposed in the humble confidence of faith. "*Therefore* are they now before the throne;" and, with mingled emotions of humility and gratitude, they cast their crowns at his feet, and ascribe "salvation to their God, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever." The work of redeeming mercy, which was their song in the house of their pilgrimage, is still the theme of their song in heaven. Not to themselves but to the Lamb do they ascribe the glories of their present state. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive praise, and honour, and glory,"—"for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

Thus did these glorious and blessed spirits enter into heaven, by that new and living way which Christ

hath opened up, and which he consecrated with his own blood. And why should *we* despair? Is not that blood as meritorious and as effectual as before? Is it less freely offered? Are we debarred from repairing to it? Is the Spirit less able or less willing to apply it? Has the fountain which was once opened in the house of Judah for sin and for uncleanness, been dried up or closed against us? Oh! no; if we perish, it is not because we have no access to that fountain, but because we are unwilling to repair to it; if we perish, it will not be because that blood has lost its efficacy, but because we will not try its virtue; not because Christ is unable to save us, but because we are unwilling to be saved. At this moment there is not one bar betwixt any of us and heaven, except our own unwillingness. Christ hath opened a wide door and an effectual, into the holiest of all; he invites us to enter in; and, guilty and polluted as we are, he assures us that "his blood cleanseth from all sin," and that, believing and trusting in that blood, though "our sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, yet shall they be as wool."

MEDITATION X.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION :”

“Thou wilt show me the path of life : in thy presence is fulness of joy ; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—
PSALM XVI. 11.

FROM the commentary of an inspired apostle, we learn, that in this Psalm, David speaks concerning Christ : “For David speaketh concerning him, ‘I foresaw the Lord always before me ; for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved : Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad ; moreover, also, my flesh shall rest in hope : Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.’ Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the Patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and *his* sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of

the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ; he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that *his* soul was not left in hell, neither did *his* flesh see corruption." The passage, therefore, refers primarily to Christ, and we may regard it as expressing that faith in God's covenant promise, by which he was animated to "endure the cross, despising the shame." But the covenant promise was not made to Christ alone,—it was made to him as the head of his body the Church, and on behalf of all his believing people ; and as, through grace, they are made partakers of his reward, and shall share in the glory of his resurrection, the words are equally applicable for the use and comfort of each of his believing followers ; and in the exercise of a simple faith in him, they may appropriate his language to themselves and say, "Thou wilt show me the path of life : in thy presence is fulness of joy ; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

When viewed in reference to our everlasting prospects, these words may be regarded as descriptive of the perfection of that happiness which is in reserve for us in heaven. To perfect happiness, two conditions are essential : *first*, That in point of amount, it be adequate to satisfy our capacities and desires ; and, *secondly*, That in point of duration, it be so permanent that at no future time it shall forsake us, and that our comfort, while it lasts, may not be diminished or disturbed by the fear of losing it. In the future happiness of believers, both of these conditions are secured ;

in its amount, it will be adequate to fill all our capacities of enjoyment,—“in thy presence is *fulness of joy* ;” and in its duration, it will be permanent,—“at thy right hand are pleasures *for evermore*.”

The FULNESS of this happiness will consist in its satisfying the desires, and perfecting the capacities of our immortal nature ; and if we would form a right estimate, either of its quality or its amount, we must take a comprehensive view of *all* the capacities with which that nature is endowed. Man may be considered in several distinct aspects—as a SENTIENT, or an INTELLECTUAL, or a MORAL, or a SOCIAL, or an ACTIVE BEING. In each of these aspects, certain capacities belong to him, and it is on the filling and perfecting of all these capacities, that his highest happiness depends. It is not enough that one class or order of his capacities be satisfied, if the rest be neglected, or denied their proper gratification ; for, although they may be considered distinctly, they do not exist separately, but in a state of combination, and from their combined perfection and satisfaction alone, can man enjoy all that such a creature is capable of. It is not enough, whatever the sensualist may say, that our capacities of organic pleasure be gratified, to the exclusion of the higher and nobler enjoyments that are peculiar to our rational and moral nature ;—every object around us may be such as to minister delight to the eye and the ear, yet, in the reign of intellectual ignorance, or in the play of unhalloed passions, there may be a hell within. Nor is it enough, whatever the stoic may say, that the mind

should be well ordered, and the passions tamed, for, by the constitution of our nature, we are both sentient and social beings, and, as such, we depend for the perfection of our interior happiness on the circumstances of our external condition. Nor is it enough, whatever the philosopher may say, that the intellect be highly cultivated, and the mind stored with knowledge ;—this is good, but insufficient for our perfect happiness, unless, along with it, we have hearts filled with every moral feeling, society in harmony with our taste, and such external accommodations as may conduce to our comfort. It is not in one of our capacities being filled, then, but in all of them being full, that our happiness consists ; and what the Bible affirms, is, that our condition in heaven will be such as to secure the perfection of every faculty, and the satisfaction of every desire.

The SENTIENT nature of man will then be perfected, and surrounded with circumstances fitted to minister to its enjoyment. Much of our happiness depends on the state of our sentient nature, and still more is derived through means of it, from the impressions made upon us by the scene in which we live. In its present state, our bodily frame is, in itself, imperfect. It is vitiated by disease, liable to frequent derangement, and easily overcome by fatigue ; and he who sums up the emotions which may be traced, directly or indirectly, to the state of his material frame, will easily discover how very large a share both of his happiness and misery flows from this source alone. The difference betwixt the enjoyment arising from a state of vigorous health,

to which every, even the most ordinary element of nature, ministers gratification, and the misery arising from sickness or disease, which interrupts every mental exercise, and tinges every object with gloom, is so great, that for health, men would esteem it a cheap purchase to exchange all the business, and wealth, and honour of the world ; but great as is the difference betwixt these two states of our sentient nature on earth, the difference will be still greater betwixt even the most vigorous and healthy body here, and the state of our frame in heaven. There, our sentient nature will be made perfect ; freed from every tendency to disease or decay, and from every accidental evil : “ It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption ; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory ; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power ; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” “ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ;” “ there shall be no more pain, neither crying nor tears ; but God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

In whatever scene a body so constituted might be placed, it would be incomparably more conducive to happiness, than the finest scene could be to a diseased or disordered frame ; but, while happiness will spring from the healthy and perfect state of our sentient nature itself, we are taught in Scripture that the external scene, from which it will derive its impressions, will be adapted to its state, so as to minister to its enjoyment. We read, not only of a new body, “ but of a new heaven and a new earth,” where there shall be no more

curse." The present world, beautiful and varied as it is, is but an imperfect specimen of creation ; for God cursed the ground for man's sake, and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth under it ; but if this world, so cursed, be yet so beautiful, what must heaven be, the immediate residence of God ! No human eye hath rested on such a scene ; it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love him. In speaking of heaven, the sacred writers seem, as it were, to labour for expressions, and by heaping together every figure descriptive of earthly grandeur or beauty, to convey to our minds some analogical sense of its glory. The new Jerusalem is described as a city, "its foundation laid in precious stones, its walls of jasper, its gates of pearls, its streets of pure gold, like transparent glass ;" at another time it is spoken of as "an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away ;"—the scenery, the music, the living fountains of heaven, are rather mentioned than described ; but we may rest assured that it will furnish ample gratification to every capacity of our sentient nature, in so far as the capacities of that nature shall survive the dissolution of our material frame.

As an INTELLECTUAL being, man is capable of a still higher happiness. Knowledge, in all its various forms, is the object,—Truth, immortal, imperishable Truth, the proper aliment and solace of his mind. By this capacity, he is raised immeasurably above the rank of mere sentient beings, and takes his place among the intelligences of heaven. But here, this source of pure

and lofty enjoyment is imperfect, partly by reason of the defectiveness of vision and the blindness of understanding which have followed as a consequence of sin ; partly, also, by reason of the prejudices preventing the full view and the free admission of truth, which spring from the disordered state of his passions, and the defective nature of his educational discipline ; partly, also, by reason of the necessary conditions of his present state, in which he must walk by faith and not by sight, and is prevented by the necessity of daily toil, and by the numerous calls of appetite or business, from improving to the uttermost even those means of knowledge which are within his reach. But in heaven, all these defects and obstacles will be removed ; his mind being then disengaged from the contact of a gross earthly body, and fitted with a new and spiritual one, will be aided by it, rather than, as now, hindered in the search of truth ; his moral nature being restored to order by the eradication of every unholy passion, will leave his intellect to act in freedom and unfettered, while the subjects of thought will be presented in all their reality and vastness before him, and those things will then be disclosed which are now concealed. God and his works, both in the wide domain of creation, and in the boundless course of providence, will furnish ample scope for his inquiries. New associates, with knowledge acquired in other ages, and perhaps in other worlds, will be found at once to stimulate his diligence, and to enrich him with information ; and the human mind, thus situated, seems to have no limit to its ad-

vancement, but a prospect of endless progression in the acquirement of Truth.

As a MORAL being, man is capable of intense misery, or of refined enjoyment, according to the nature of those feelings or passions which prevail in his bosom. Anger, wrath, malice, lust, envy, jealousy, revenge,—these elements of unholy passion make the human heart an inward hell, and deprive him of the power of enjoying either sensible or intellectual gratification, blasting prosperity, and making life itself a burden. But, on the other hand, when the mind is filled with *love*—with love to God, with love to others,—when the heart is pure, the will resigned, the temper meek—these are the elements of a happiness, which, as being interior to the mind itself, no outward accident can destroy—they are the springs of perennial peace. This moral happiness may, like the enjoyments formerly mentioned, be tasted on earth; but here, like them also, it is imperfect, even in the maturest believers. The remains of indwelling sin, the roots of bitterness, are still in the heart, and the graces of the Christian character, although implanted and watered by the Spirit, are weak and sickly. But in God's presence this joy will be full. No evil passion shall enter heaven along with us. Into that high sanctuary nothing shall enter that defileth, or worketh abomination. It is an asylum for pure and holy spirits—the spirits of just men made perfect. Not the prevailing power only, but the very presence of sin shall be abolished for ever. That is a great change which takes place on earth when a sinner

is converted unto God ; when his eyes are first opened, and he is turned from darkness unto light, delivered from the bondage of corruption, and brought into the moral liberty wherewith Christ maketh his people free. That is a great change,—for the dominion of sin is then, for the first time, broken, and, from being the servant of Satan, the convert becomes the servant of God. By that change he is translated from a state of guilt and condemnation, into a state of *grace*. But another transition is necessary to perfect his blessedness,—he must be translated from a state of grace into a state of glory. In the former, his sanctification is imperfect, his moral affections are as yet but feeble, frequently interrupted in their exercise, and their happy influence impaired by the remains of indwelling sin. The believer is engaged, while he lives here, in a continual conflict with his own corruptions, and with the power of moral evil on every side of him. But that conflict ends with death,—then the very being of sin in his soul will be destroyed, and, released from all the fetters by which he is now bound, and from all the obstacles by which his progress is now retarded, he enters on a career of uninterrupted and perfect holiness. “He shall be presented faultless and blameless before the presence of his God, with exceeding joy ;” for “Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, and present it to himself a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.” The completion of our sanctification, the absolute perfection of our moral nature in heaven, will

be, in itself, one of the chief sources of our happiness, as well as a means of qualifying us for the enjoyment of all the other springs of comfort with which heaven is filled.

There is a vast difference betwixt the state of believers on earth, and their state in heaven,—between sanctification begun through grace, and sanctification perfected in glory. Here, holiness appears as in its first dawn, like the morning twilight gradually progressive, indeed, and the harbinger of “perfect day,” yet still dim and obscure, and frequently overspread with clouds; but there it shall shine, in meridian splendour, a sun without decline. Here, the power of indwelling sin, although broken, is not destroyed; the growth is checked, but the roots remain deep in the heart. There, not only the reign, but the presence of sin shall be abolished, and every lust shall not only be repressed, but eradicated for ever. Here, from the constitution of human society, and the circumstances of human life, the believer is surrounded with temptation, and apt to be either terrified, or ridiculed, or seduced into sin. There, no temptation shall be presented, but, on the contrary, every influence from without shall be favourable to the stability and progress of holiness. Above all, here, the believer, while he is in part transformed into the image of Christ, by the partial and obscure views which he is enabled to obtain of his glorious character, yet as he “sees only through a glass darkly,” Christ’s image on his soul is imperfect, in proportion as his knowledge is defective · but there, “he shall see

face to face," and "when Christ shall appear, he shall be like him, *for* he shall see him as he is."

It is one of the sublimest doctrines of Scripture that men may become like to God himself, in point of character. And can we anticipate such a result, without seeing that it is the highest perfection of our moral nature, and a source of the most exalted satisfaction and happiness? "I shall be satisfied when I awake in *thy likeness*," says the Psalmist,—satisfied not till then, for our nature is not perfected, nor its high capacities filled, if we rest short of this; but then, satisfied to the full; for what higher attainment, or what nobler happiness, can any created being desire, than a character conformed to the character of God?

While these views of the character of the redeemed address a very solemn warning to those who are still disposed to cherish their evil passions, they are fitted to encourage and comfort the minds of believers, whose chief burden, while they remain on earth, is the power of indwelling sin. For it assures them, that *each of them* will then be perfect,—perfect up to the full capacity of their moral nature. And how cheering is it to the man who is daily struggling against his corruptions, to know that his struggle will end in victory! How animating to him who is daily mourning over his backslidings, to know that he will soon be confirmed in a state of unchangeable integrity! and how consoling when he looks on his best righteousness here as "filthy rags," to anticipate the time when he shall be arrayed "in white robes!" And it adds to his consolation,

that *all around him* will be equally holy ; that, amidst that innumerable multitude, not one envious, nor uncharitable, nor sensual, nor rebellious spirit, shall be found ; not one who will ridicule his principles, or seek to seduce him from his piety, but all shall be of one heart, and of one mind, and mutual helpers of each other's holiness and joy. And how consoling, even now, to those who have lost near and dear friends, is the reflection, that if they were prepared for their departure, they are already placed beyond the reach of many evil influences to which they were here exposed, and admitted into a company of the holiest, and best, and happiest spirits in the universe ! Had we been called to leave them behind us in this world, our anxiety must have been great as to the influence of that mixed society, and those evil examples to which they would be exposed after our departure ; but there, they shall meet with no unkindness, no harsh word shall disturb their serenity, no deceitful friendship wound their feelings, no seductions sap their principles, but, being received and welcomed by " the just made perfect," they are safe up in heaven. And, finally, if we can discern in our own spirits any evidence of sanctification, let us cherish it as the first dawn of that holy light which shall issue in everlasting day ; the springing blade which shall blossom in heaven ; the earnest and pledge of the perfection of our nature ; nay, as the first faint beginning of that character which shall be perfected on high. Oh ! with what reverence should a Christian regard his own soul, if it be now putting on

the robe in which it shall appear before the throne, and how careful to guard that principle of grace within him, which is the germ of future glory!

As a SOCIAL being, man is dependent on the society with which he mingles for a very large share of his personal happiness. By sympathy, he is so connected with others, that he must often weep when they weep, and rejoice when they rejoice. By this natural instinct, he shrinks from the contemplation of extreme suffering, and feels his happiness increased by the happiness of those around him ; and, by his moral nature, the believer is disqualified from enjoying the company of the wicked, and yearns after the fellowship of those who have kindred principles and feelings with his own. This is the ground of that strong love which, notwithstanding their petty differences, subsists betwixt all the sincere disciples of Christ on earth. But here the enjoyment of Christian fellowship is marred by various causes, arising from the imperfection both of our present condition, and of our Christian graces ; partly by the diversities of opinion which flow from the limited range of our present vision, or the undue influence of prejudice ; partly by the difficulty of discovering the true followers of Christ in the midst of so many nominal or false professors, and the suspicion, or at least the caution, which frequent disappointment, in this respect, is fitted to inspire ; partly, also, by the obstacles which the necessary business of life, or the established distinctions betwixt different classes of men, interpose to that free intercourse on which the enjoy-

ment of society depends; and, most of all, by the weakness of love, both on our part, and on the part of others. But all these impediments to social happiness shall be removed in heaven. There, our little prejudices, whether against persons or parties, shall disappear. There, we shall be in no danger of misplacing our confidence, or of being deceived by hollow professors, but “shall know, even as also we are known.” There, if there be not a perfect equality in point of capacity or dignity, there will at least be no pride on the one hand, and no servile fear on the other; and there, above all, love—pure, generous, disinterested love—which is the cement of all happy society, shall burn in every bosom, and prompt every word and action. Oh! blessed season, when the strifes of this lower world shall cease, and be forgotten, and when, superior to every prejudice and passion, we shall dwell as brethren together in unity!

And, consider how perfect that society will be, in which no ungodly, or ungrateful, or treacherous person shall be found, but in which we shall hold converse with all the wisest and best men that ever existed on the earth,—with the patriarchs, and prophets, and saints of old,—with the apostles, and confessors, and martyrs of our faith,—with the reformers, and witnesses for God’s truth, in all nations and ages,—with every man that ever loved God, and his Christ, throughout the whole world. Other orders of intelligent being, will also be there,—angels, archangels, seraphim and cherubim; ministering spirits, who, while we sojourned

on earth, watched over us as the heirs of salvation, rejoicing with joy in the presence of God at our conversion : how shall they rejoice with us, on our introduction into glory ! Such society, so free from every intermixture of base alloy, and so replete with the means of highest instruction, and with the spirit of loftiest principle, shall surely constitute one of the sweetest springs of happiness in heaven.

In reference to the society of heaven, it is well worthy of being considered, that in it will be found the greatest, the wisest, and the best, from every nation and of every age. It is one of the chief glories of heaven, indeed, that it is not confined to the great or the learned of this world ; but neither is it exclusive of them. While every humble and simple-hearted Christian will be admitted, however limited may be his attainments, and however undistinguished his name, and while, unquestionably, the grand distinction of their character is that which is common to them all, viz., their resemblance to God in the moral dispositions and affections of their hearts, yet it is surely an interesting feature in our future prospects, that in heaven we shall meet with those great, and wise, and holy men, whose names are recorded in sacred history, and whose example has been thought worthy of being held up for our encouragement and imitation in the house of our pilgrimage. It is specially mentioned by our Lord himself, that when Lazarus died he was carried by angels into the presence of Abraham, the father of the faithful ; and what Christian does not

feel his spirit elevated and cheered by the prospect of meeting, not only the venerable patriarchs and prophets of the Jewish Church, but the apostles and first disciples, the confessors and martyrs, who in every age have witnessed a good confession, and in every land bequeathed their heroic example as a legacy to the Church of Christ? Heaven is the asylum, the home of all these mighty and noble spirits. They appeared at intervals, and were often widely separated on earth, but they are now met in that holy place, to which, however unworthy, *we* also are invited to aspire.

And "if, as holiest men have deem'd there be,
A land of souls beyond that sable shore,
To shame the doctrine of the Sadducee,
And Sophists madly vain of dubious lore;
How sweet it were in concert to adore
With those who made our mortal labours light,
To hear each voice we fear'd to hear no more,
Behold each mighty shade reveal'd to sight,
The Bactrian, Samian Sage, and all who taught the
right."

But not less interesting is the prospect of finding amongst the society of heaven, the pious relatives and friends whom we have lost on earth. That is indeed a transcendent vision,

"Which paints the lost on earth revived in heaven,"
and yet not more transcendent than true. For the apostle, designing to comfort the brethren respecting them that are asleep, points to their meeting again and

spending an eternity together in heaven, as a reason why believers should not sorrow for the dead as those who have no hope. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up *together with them* in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

As death does not destroy, but is rather the occasion of perfecting, the essential faculties of human nature, and as, among other faculties, we learn from various intimations of Scripture that memory will be preserved, we cannot doubt that friends will remember and recognise each other in heaven: and, oh! what joyful congratulations must then be interchanged betwixt parents and children, brothers and sisters, friend and friend, who have mutually prayed for each other on earth, and oftentimes feared for each other's welfare, when, victorious over every enemy, and having surmounted every difficulty or danger, they shall meet around the throne in heaven! Here, what deeper emotion can swell the heart of a Christian parent, than that which arises from the first, though faint, dawnings of grace in the bosom of a beloved child? but deep as is the joy of such a parent, he is depressed by the thought that the heart of his child is deceit-

ful, that he is surrounded with snares, that soon he may be left alone in the world, without the benefit of parental care or counsel, and that, like too many others, he may make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and in age belie the promise of his earlier years. But if the dawn of grace create joy, what must be the joy of meeting that child in glory; especially when it is considered that, henceforth, no temptation shall assail, and no enemy disturb his principles or his happiness for ever! If, on earth, a parent welcomes his child on his return from a long and perilous voyage, with feelings too big for human utterance, what shall be the joy of that welcome with which he shall be greeted on his arrival in heaven, by those friends who are there before him, and who had often fasted, and wept, and prayed, even while they could as yet scarcely venture to hope, for his salvation!

But, besides the multitude of human spirits with whom the redeemed shall enjoy happy and congenial fellowship, their society embraces several other orders of intelligent and holy beings, who shall there mingle with them, and enhance their happiness. We find in the context that the angels and seraphim are engaged in *the same act* of religious worship with the redeemed from the earth. When the redeemed sing the song of God and of the Lamb, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood," the apostle adds, "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne; and the num-

ber of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands ; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and honour, and glory."

And as they are represented as engaging in the same services in heaven, so we have reason to believe that the redeemed, while they were on the earth, were the objects of their interest and care : it is emphatically declared by our Lord himself, that "there is joy in heaven amongst the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth ;" that "the angels desired to look" into the mystery of man's redemption, and were employed, in various ways, in the course of its application, as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who should be heirs of salvation." Did they rejoice over one sinner when he was converted, and with what joyful welcome, then, will they receive him when he arrives in heaven ! Did they minister to him on earth as an heir, and will they stand aloof from him when he enters on the possession of his inheritance ? It cannot be ; and what gives a peculiar value to their society, is, that they have been for ages, and perhaps in very different parts of the universe, gathering knowledge of God and of his works, to which, on earth, the redeemed had no means of access, but which shall be imparted to them in heaven ; and how much their higher knowledge must add to the information of men, cannot require to be proved.

Here, then, is a glorious prospect opened up for us, a prospect into the invisible world, a world peopled

with pure and happy spirits ready to receive and welcome us into their blessed society. Yes, we are called to come “unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to God the Judge of all.” How should such a prospect raise us above the sordid cares, and low ambitions, and degrading fellowships of the present world! Let us feel ourselves to be citizens of a nobler state, members of a purer society, and heirs of a better inheritance hereafter. And if at times we are despised,—if our names are unknown, or known only to be ridiculed by men,—if we are poor and insignificant in comparison with many around us, let the prospect of our admission into the society of heaven, inspire us with a just sense of our dignity as immortal beings, and preserve us both from abject thoughts, and from degrading subserviency.

Man is an ACTIVE being; and some suitable employment for his active powers seems to be essential to his perfect happiness. This will be supplied by the *services* of heaven. We find from Scripture, that in such services the angels themselves are employed;—sometimes around the throne on high, an example of which we have in the account given of their worship and adoration; sometimes on missions to distant parts of God’s dominions, an example of which we have in

their ministering to believers on earth. It is presumable that men, being qualified for similar services, will be similarly engaged, as without such employment, some faculties of their nature would be unoccupied, some graces of their character unexercised, and some of their capacities of enjoyment unfilled. But then, there will be a vast difference betwixt the nature of their employments on earth and in heaven. On earth, their faculties are, in a great measure, engrossed with such labours as are necessary for the mere support of physical life; and although, even in a state of innocence, man was placed in the garden to dress it and to keep it, the extreme amount of labour which is now imposed on us for this end, is the effect of that curse which was denounced against sin,—“cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.” But for this curse, a much smaller amount of labour might have sufficed for the mere support of life, and our faculties might have been left free to engage in higher pursuits. It is true, that this curse was wisely and mercifully imposed,—and is wisely and mercifully converted into a means of preventing the much greater evils which must have ensued, had man, fallen and vicious, been under no necessity to labour, or had he been even comparatively idle; for, with disordered passions, such relaxation might have accelerated the growth of depravity, which is checked by the hard necessities of our present state; but here, the reason of the curse being removed, the curse itself shall be withdrawn,—“there shall be,”

says the apostle, "no more curse." It follows, there shall no longer be the same necessity for hard and unintermitted labour, with the view of procuring the mere necessities of life ; and thus the faculties of man, disengaged from inferior pursuits, shall be left free for higher and more suitable employments,—for the acquisition of knowledge, for the study of God's works and ways, and for such services as God may be pleased to require at his hands. What these services will be, we cannot at present determine ; but we may rest assured that they will be suitable to the dignity and greatness of the immortal mind, and will mainly consist in acts of homage to God, and beneficence to one another.

The redeemed shall "serve him day and night in his temple." In one sense, indeed, it is said that there is "no temple in heaven," because, in so far as they were of the nature of means, the gifts and services of the church on earth are superseded and set aside, when the grand end is attained in heaven. Hence, the apostle declares, that "prophecies shall fail, and tongues shall cease," there being no farther occasion for such means, when they have accomplished the object for which they were designed ; and knowledge also, such knowledge as we have on earth, shall vanish away in the perfect vision of God.

But religion is not only a means, it is, in itself, an end ; the chief end, the very perfection of our nature ; and religion being not a passive but an active principle, must needs have its appropriate exercises and

expressions for ever. If penitential confession shall no longer be made, it shall only be superseded by songs of praise; if the ordinance of preaching, and the use of the sacrament shall be abolished, it is only because no one shall need to teach another, saying, "Know the Lord, for all shall know him, from the least even unto the greatest." The exercises which are appropriate to religion as a means of preparation for heaven, shall cease, but the services which are essential to religion as a living and everlasting attribute of human nature, shall continue for ever.

Heaven, then, will perfect all the faculties and fill all the capacities of the human soul; and whether we view him as a sentient, or an intellectual, or a moral, or a social, or an active being, man will find, that "in God's presence there is fulness of joy."

It must never be forgotten, however, that, perfect as the constitution of our nature, and ample as the external means of its gratification shall then be, our chief happiness must be derived from God himself. No other object can fully satisfy his people even in heaven.

He is their portion, and it is in the enjoyment of God as their chief good, aided, as that enjoyment will then be, by full manifestation on his part, and free communion on theirs, that their everlasting blessedness shall mainly consist. He is the object of their supreme love; and as they perceive more and more of the excellency of the divine character, they will love and delight in it the more. And thus shall they reach the chief end of their being, the very highest perfection of their

nature, which consists in “glorifying God and enjoying him for ever.”

For this end they shall be placed in the most favourable position,—“they shall stand before the throne of God,”—in his “presence,”—at his “right hand.” At present, clouds and darkness are round about the throne,—we walk by faith, not by sight,—but then, we shall behold what has heretofore been disclosed only in rare and imperfect visions to some of his inspired ministers. What Micaiah beheld, when he said, “I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left;”—and what Ezekiel beheld, when he said, “I looked, and behold the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was *full of the brightness of the Lord's glory*;”—and what Isaiah beheld when he said, “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high, and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts;”—and what Daniel beheld, when he said, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given unto him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages,

should serve him : his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed ;"—and what John beheld in Patmos, when he said, " I was in the Spirit ; and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne." " And round about the throne were four-and-twenty seats ; and upon the seats I saw four-and-twenty elders, and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings, and thunderings, and voices ; and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God ;"—all this, which heretofore has been but darkly disclosed in visions, and much more, even " the unutterable things " of which the apostle speaks, shall be laid open—to *every one* of God's people in heaven.

We cannot form an adequate conception of that beatific vision, nor of the manner in which God's glory shall then be displayed. But heaven is every where in Scripture represented as, in a peculiar sense, the place of Jehovah's residence ; and, in comparison with the view of the divine glory which they shall enjoy in his immediate presence, the apostle declares that, on earth, believers see only through a glass darkly, but then they shall see face to face, and know, even as also they are known. In that sanctuary of the universe—that Catholic Church of perfected minds—God's glory will be visible as was the Shekinah in the temple of old.

There is reason to believe that, in more than one of the visions already referred to, it was the mediatorial

throne which the prophets saw, and Christ who appeared on it. Heaven is the place of his residence, and there "every eye shall see him." And who that loves the Redeemer can contemplate the prospect of being admitted into his immediate presence, without the deepest emotions of holy joy! Do we think that those were highly privileged who companied with him on earth—who looked on his benignant countenance—who listened to his gracious words? and shall we not look forward with exultation to the prospect of spending an eternity in his presence! "The Lamb which sitteth on the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of water." Do we, in a foreign land, dwell with melancholy fondness on the recollection of a beloved friend at home; and, as the time of our necessary absence draws near its close, do we, with exulting hope, look forward to the prospect of meeting him, and think little of the danger of the voyage which shall bring us near to him? And why should we not, in this foreign land, remember our home in heaven, and our friend and benefactor there, and surmount the fear of that passage through the swellings of Jordan, which will bring us into his immediate presence, and leave us with him for ever? On earth our hopes may be disappointed—our friend may be changed—or, ere we arrive, disease and death may have done their work, and where we hoped for a cheerful welcome, we may find his house desolate and deserted; or, even should we find our friend, yet, the first happy meeting past, our joy is chastened by the thought that it cannot last,

—we may perceive the symptoms of growing decay, the omens of speedy dissolution ; but Christ cannot change—his affection for us can suffer no diminution—and once admitted into his presence, we “ shall ever be with the Lord.”

But full as this joy may be, and adequate, whilst it lasts, to satisfy every capacity of our nature, its worth would be materially diminished were it transient or fleeting, for then the prospect of losing it would be fraught with a regret proportioned to the value which we set upon the possession of it. Were the spirits of just men made perfect ever so happy, yet the thought that such happiness might pass away, would, of itself, sadden them. There is no room, however, for such sad forebodings in heaven. There, happiness is not less permanent than complete,—“ these pleasures are *for evermore.*” This is a grand characteristic of heaven,—it is a constant, unchangeable, everlasting state. On earth, riches may take to themselves wings and flee away, and the possessor may be left in the desolation of poverty ; fame may be blasted by our own indiscretion, or by the malice of others, and leave us to dishonour and shame ; friendship may be broken up by intestine divisions, or by successive bereavements, and leave us in the world friendless and alone ; our beloved occupations may fail us, or we may become unfit for them ; and, even were health, and fortune, and fame, and business, as stable while we live, as every day’s experience shows them to be transient, yet we have the absolute and unerring assurance, that they must terminate at

death. But *eternity* is an attribute of heaven. There, *life* will be everlasting, and every thing that renders a life in heaven desirable, will be everlasting too. Our sentient nature will never decay—nor our intellectual vision grow dim—nor our moral nature become disordered—nor our society be reduced by disease or death—nor our employments come to an end. Eternity is inscribed on them all. And who can conceive the magnitude of eternity! Had we lived from the creation downwards to the present time, or had we an assurance that, from this hour, we should continue to live onward till the earth should be no more, these large intervals of time would seem to afford scope for much experience and enjoyment; but what are these, or any other measures of time, when compared to eternity! The vast idea is too great for our limited comprehensions, while we are so constituted, that we cannot rid ourselves of the idea of infinity, whether in regard to space or time; we can only apprehend it faintly, by means of inadequate comparisons. Who can think of a million of years, or a million of centuries, without awe? But, after a million of years, or a million of centuries, shall have passed away, eternity will be still before us. Oh! how sublime, when our prospect is an eternity in heaven—how unspeakably dreadful, if our prospect be an eternity in hell!

Let us, as the disciples of Christ, think much on our everlasting hopes, and never forget, amidst the cares, and distresses, and drudgery of the world, that we have immortal spirits within us, and a glorious inheritance

before us. This will animate us to persevere in the Christian course, unseduced by the temptations, and undeterred by the ridicule of the world. It will give to the poor man an ennobling estimate of himself, such as may preserve him from debasing habits, or a servile spirit, and will cheer the toils and troubles of life, with a consolation which the worldling never knew.

The exceeding glory of this prospect, indeed, is apt to stagger the faith of many who, feeling their own insignificance, and deploring their own vileness, can hardly believe that such a destiny awaits them. But is the predicted glory more wonderful than what God hath already wrought? Is it more wonderful that we should be exalted to heaven, than that the Son of God should have descended from it? *His humiliation* being the groundwork, can we wonder at the glorious superstructure which shall be reared upon it? Nay, is not some such glorious result *necessary* to render that complete and credible which has already been done? For what worthy end was the sacrifice of Christ offered, unless some grand result of that sacrifice remains yet to be revealed? Heaven is but a *suitable sequel* to the scheme of redemption!—a scene of glory bearing a due proportion to the work of Gethsemane and Calvary!—an end that shall at once explain and justify the marvellous means by which it was accomplished!

Does such a glorious place exist any where in the universe of God! Are we called to aspire after it,—and is it possible for us to reach it? nay, is it an

inheritance already secured for us, and has our great forerunner gone to take possession in our name, and to prepare it for our reception? Then, why should we be cast down or dismayed? Are the trials of life, or the terrors of death, to be compared with the exceeding weight of glory which is about to be revealed? Shall we sink or falter by the way, when we know that we are journeying to a land of everlasting rest, and shall soon reach our eternal home? Shall the dark valley of death affright us, when we see beyond it the fields of immortality smiling in the verdure of eternal spring? Destined as we are for heaven, shall we grieve or murmur that the earth is not found to be a suitable resting-place for immortal beings, and that God checks every tendency to rest here, by sharp afflictions and severe disappointment? God forbid! Heaven, seen even in the distance, should allure us onwards, and its glorious light should cast a cheering ray over the darkest passages of life. Nay, not only should the hope of heaven prevent us from complaining of the afflictions of life, but the thought that these afflictions are even now preparing us for that blessed state; that they are ordained as necessary and useful means of discipline to promote our progress towards it; that they are the furnace by which the dross is to be purged away, and the pure ore fitted for the Master's use in the upper sanctuary, should reconcile us to resigned submission, should make us grateful, that such discipline being needful, it has not been withheld, and lead us to pray earnestly that it may be so blessed for our use, as that we

shall in due time be presented faultless and blameless before the presence of God's glory, with exceeding joy.

It concerns the Christian while he sojourns in the vale of tears, to be much engaged in meditating on the prospect of a blessed immortality, since this subject, when suitably improved, may conduce both to the stability of his principles, and the settlement of his peace. The hope of heaven is, either directly or indirectly, the source of all the happiness which the believer enjoys; for, says the apostle, "If in this life only we had hope in Christ, we were, of all men, most miserable;"—it is his best support under sorrow, for never does sorrow appear more light than when viewed in connection with "an eternal weight of glory;"—it is the grand motive to a persevering warfare against sin, and a diligent pursuit after holiness, for, "if the dead rise not," why should he not follow the example of them who say, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;"—it is the source of abundant fruitfulness, for "then is he stedfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, when he knows that his labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." Heaven is the perfect state of the Christian, both in respect of character and happiness; the consummation of all his toils, the finished model of that excellence, after which, amidst all the darkness which now obscures his vision, and the temptations which try his virtue, and the sorrows which chequer his course on earth, he still aspires; and surely it is well that he who has begun the race, should keep his eye fixed on the goal; that he who hath begun the

combat, should encourage himself by the glory of the coming triumph ; and that he who, in the midst of sin, hath formed the lofty conception, and cherished the pure love of virtue, should behold that virtue victorious, and frequently turn his thoughts to heaven, where, whatever is pure, or peaceable, or lovely, is embodied in the grand result of his present labours, and where the highest perfection of holiness is combined with the noblest kind, the largest measure, and the most enduring certainty of blessedness. He who, amidst the imperfections of humanity, aims at perfecting his rational and immortal nature, and seeks to find, in the elevation of his moral sentiments, a source of pure and lasting enjoyment, may well be encouraged by the thought, that others, equally guilty and helpless, have succeeded in the same noble enterprise before him ; and he who, in prosecuting this grand design, is apt to be discouraged by finding himself in a small minority on earth, may well draw encouragement from the multitude, which no man can number, who are around the throne of God. Already have they weathered the storm and reached their destination ; and, oh ! it is cheering, when we are struggling with the storms and billows of this mortal life, to think, that whatever troubles may arise to distress the faithful, and to endanger the Church on earth, already the greater portion of the Church is safe up in heaven, and that soon, very soon, if we persevere, we shall be added to their number, and welcomed as their “fellow-sufferers and fellow-conquerors on high.”

MEDITATION XI.

FS. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION:”

“Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”—2 COR. V. 6-8.

THAT “the souls of believers are made perfect at death,” is one of those delightful doctrines which Scripture clearly teaches, and of which a revelation from God alone could give us full assurance. That the soul is not destroyed when the body is dissolved,—that it survives the decay and wreck of our physical frame,—that our rational and moral faculties are neither benumbed into a state of insensibility, nor suspended in their exercise, by that solemn event which terminates our connection with the present world,—but, on the contrary, are freed from every encumbrance by which their exercise had here been cramped or interrupted, and translated into a state wherein they shall continue to expand, and act with greater vigour than before;—these are some of the

sublimest truths of Scripture, and they open to us a prospect which has no limit—the prospect of an eternal existence—a never-dying consciousness, which, as it feeds an elevating hope respecting the future, so it should teach us now to entertain a reverence for ourselves, as beings over whom death itself shall have no permanent power. It is true, we must submit to that humiliating method of departing out of this world, which God has imposed as the wages of sin. We enter not on eternity as by a “triumphal march,”* but through suffering, and agony, and shame. The body is dissolved, and decays, and it must be interred in the dark and lonesome grave,—but our nobler nature survives. Looking on the agonies of dissolving nature, or on the dreary stillness which succeeds, we might have supposed, that here was a final period of conscious existence,—that all was over with the busy, active, and restless spirit, which, for years, had fluttered amidst the cares or pleasures of the world; but that spirit is not *dead*, it is *departed*, and will appear again on another scene.

In reference to believers, the apostle distinctly affirms, that death only makes a change in the *residence* or abode of the never-dying soul; that heretofore it was at home in the body and absent from the Lord; but at death, the same soul is *absent* from the body and *present* with the Lord. And founding on this fact, he expresses a preference for the latter state, the state which shall come after death, for this reason

* DR CHALMERS.

—that, in our present condition, both our character and our happiness are alike defective ; whereas, in our future one, both our character and our happiness shall be better and more secure.

Now, this implies, that such a change takes place at the hour of death, as is fitly denoted by the difference betwixt an *imperfect* and a *perfect* condition, and as is sufficient to warrant a desire on our part, to enter, even though it be by death, on that more perfect and glorious state. We must experience it before we shall be able to describe the change which the soul undergoes at the hour of its departure from the body. But there are two considerations which may help us to see that there is a great change, and that, in the case of the believer, it is a change for the better.

The first is, that so long as the soul is united to the body, and dwells upon the earth, it is in a situation which subjects it to great difficulty, and exposes it to numerous temptations and trials. The mere presence of the body, with all its numerous wants and weaknesses, and with the instincts and passions which an animal existence implies,—the remaining power of indwelling sin, or that law in the members which warreth against the law of the mind,—the presence, too, of an evil world, which exerts an unfavourable influence on the spiritual life,—and above all, the necessary conditions of our present state, as these are described by the apostle, when he says, “ we walk by faith, and not by sight,”—and again, “ when we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord ;”—these evils or defects, which

cleave necessarily to the believer in his present state, and by which his spiritual progress is impeded, and his spiritual comfort impaired, are, all of them, removed by death, seeing that then the soul is emancipated from the body, delivered out of an evil world, and no longer retained in a state of absence from God,—from these it is delivered; and that is one important consideration.

The second is, that it is placed at death in another state, as favourable to its holiness and happiness as the former was unfavourable; it is *present* with the Lord, says the apostle, and no longer walks by faith, but faith has been converted into vision. All the realities of the spiritual world, formerly believed in on the testimony of God, are now disclosed to it, and its own sensible experience is superadded to the evidence hitherto enjoyed. This is the clear import of the passage. Believers may, indeed, be said to *excel* other men in the present state, inasmuch as, while others walk by sight of things now seen, believers walk by faith of things unseen; but departed believers do, in like manner, *excel* those presently on the earth, seeing that while the latter walk by faith and not by sight, the former have something more than faith itself, they have a personal experience and observation in that better world, of those things which we only believe. And hence the apostle, contrasting the present with the future state of believers, says, “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

This change in the *condition* of a believing soul, may well serve to account for its being now made perfect ; and hence, we read of “ the spirits of just men made perfect ; ” and of those who, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, are now before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple ; who hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; but the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, feedeth them, and leadeth them unto living fountains of water, and God wipes away all tears from their eyes.

Let it be carefully observed, however, that the apostle is speaking here of true Christians who had undergone the great initial change of regeneration, and in whom the work of sanctification had made some progress. In reference to them he says, that what had hitherto been imperfect in their state and character is made perfect by their translation out of this world into another and a better. But death is not a means of conversion or of sanctification in itself, and can have no effect in ridding those of their corruptions who have cherished them all their lives long, and who die impenitent and unpardoned. The dissolution of the body has no efficacy in destroying the ruling principles of any human soul ; it only changes its situation, and leaves those principles to develope themselves more freely and more fully in eternity. And hence, while a converted and sanctified man will find himself, after death, relieved from various encumbrances which had marred his spiritual progress on earth, and furnished with new

and better facilities in heaven ; an unconverted man, although absent from the body, will not, on that account, be present with the Lord ; but “ being banished from his presence,” and given over to the society of reprobate spirits, his vicious character will still cleave to him, and the bitterness and hopelessness of his condition will mainly consist in his being left, through eternity, just as death found him,—the willing, but wretched slave of his own lusts.

The apostle’s language clearly implies that the souls of believers do *immediately* pass into glory. Their *disembodied* state, it is true, differs widely, both from their condition on earth, and from their ultimate condition after the resurrection. Their bodies are for a season laid in the grave, and shall rest there till the trumpet shall sound and the dead be raised ; and their full and perfect redemption shall not be realized, till soul and body shall come together at the judgment of the great day. But what we affirm is, that even their disembodied state, differing, as it unquestionably does, both from their previous and their ultimate one, is neither a state of insensibility, nor a state of indecision, nor a state of probation and trial ; but that, immediately on their leaving the body, they become sensible of their condition, and are admitted to partake of those pleasures which God has prepared for them that love him. With what organs they are furnished, in what form they live, or whether any new form is bestowed upon them, is no where clearly pointed out in Scripture ; although, from the case of Moses and Elias, who

appeared visibly along with our Lord on the Mount, as well as from the souls whom John saw under the altar in the Apocalypse, and the vision of Lazarus and Abraham, represented in one of the parables, it may be presumed that some visible outward form is given to them ; but whatever opinion may be formed on these speculative points, and respecting which, as being speculative, Scripture gives no very explicit information, the great fact is revealed, that their state is fixed and settled from the hour of each man's death ; that they are sensible of that state, and derive from it a measure of happiness far transcending any which the maturest Christian can either enjoy or hope for upon the earth. This is conclusively established by the apostle's language. His statement is, that so long as a believer is "at home in the body, he is absent from the Lord." He represents "presence with the Lord" as immediately consequent on our departure from the body, otherwise there could be no ground for the preference which in this and in another passage the apostle expresses. Comparing his state on earth with that which would follow immediately on the dissolution of the body, he says, "we are willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord ;" and again, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." It is evident that there could have been no ground for the apostle's hesitation in this matter, on the supposition that his death was not to be followed immediately with glory. If, after death, we were to remain in a state of insensi-

bility till the resurrection, then out of a regard to his own happiness, and from the strong desire which he felt to be useful to the Church on earth, he must have been anxious to protract the term of his mortal pilgrimage; and no reason can be assigned for his preferring death to life, which is not based on the supposition, that death would afford an immediate introduction into the presence of God and of Christ. And accordingly, thus he speaks of it, “absent from the body, and present with the Lord,”—“to depart, and *to be with Christ*, which is far better.”

His words not only intimate, that believers are at death made perfect, and that they do immediately pass into glory, but he declares his willingness to depart,—“we are willing *rather* to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

The apostle does not quarrel with the present life; he was neither discontented with the world, nor reluctant to remain in it. On the contrary, in stating his willingness to depart, he is careful to intimate his entire acquiescence in the disposal of Providence, as to his living or dying. He draws a comparison betwixt his present and his future state, not as betwixt a bad and a good, but as betwixt a good and a better; he prefers heaven, but is not discontented upon the earth; he would rather be absent from the body and present with the Lord; but so long as God had work for him to do, he was prepared, in the spirit of meek, and patient, and resigned submission, to say with Job, “All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my

change come." In like manner, in the parallel passage, having expressed his desire to depart, he adds, "nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you; and having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith." What nobler attitude can a rational spirit assume than that in which the apostle appears in these passages! when, with a calm and comprehensive eye, he seems to survey the whole prospect which lies before him, as an immortal being, and seeing it divided into two parts of very unequal magnitude,—the one, a short span of time—the other, the vast expanse of eternity,—regards time as the youth, and eternity as the manhood of his being; the present life as the season of duty and preparation, in which he must be disciplined and trained; and the life to come, as the season of matured wisdom and perfect enjoyment; the earth as the antechamber of heaven, and death the mere portal which opens betwixt the two; and, while he longs for heaven, and feels the trials of his present lot, is, nevertheless, patiently submissive to God's will, in the assurance, that so long as he is continued here, God has work for him to do, and that, sooner or later, all his trials shall terminate in victory, and all his labours in a glorious reward!

In explanation of the apostle's preference, let it be observed, that his language does not imply either that he *made light of death*, or that he had no dislike or aversion to it *considered in itself*. There is, indeed,

a slavish fear of death, through which some are all their lifetime subject to bondage, and from which the apostle was delivered, as it was the Saviour's design to deliver all his disciples. But there is a natural fear of death, which is, in some sense, a necessary concomitant or result of the great primary law of self-preservation—a law, which, like every other ordination of God, bespeaks the wisdom and goodness of him by whom it was established. Had we no aversion from suffering, and no fear of death, we might rashly or carelessly expose ourselves to such danger, and incur such calamities as would abridge our term of existence, and send us prematurely out of this state of being. Nor is this all; it is hardly possible to conceive how much God's moral government would suffer, were that natural law reversed, whereby pain and suffering are made sensible and alarming evils; for, were men less averse than they now are to suffering or dissolution, the wicked would be less restrained by fear, the righteous less benefited by discipline and chastisement, the law would lose the natural sanctions by which it is now enforced, and sin would be exempt from many powerful checks to which it is now subjected. Hence, as it would materially impair the efficacy of his moral government, and interfere with the first great law of our rational nature, we cannot suppose that it was God's design in the Gospel, far less that it is absolutely essential to our salvation, that the natural fear of death should be totally destroyed, or exchanged for stoical apathy and uncon-

cern. And for such fears, therefore, in so far as they arise out of the law of nature, and are consistent with right reason, we are bound to make every allowance, especially in the case of the timid disciple. In point of fact, the apostle does not make light of death, either as in itself an inconsiderable matter, or as of trivial moment, when considered in connection with its consequences. In itself, he knew it to be an evil and a bitter thing to die, and hence he speaks of it as *an enemy*—"the last enemy which shall be destroyed is death;" and, in its consequences, he knew that it would, on the one hand, separate him at once from this world, the scene of his loved employment in his Master's service, and of his sweet fellowship with his Master's followers; and, on the other, introduce him into a world of spirits, known to him as to us, only by the hearing of faith, and to which he was yet a stranger. An event so painful to flesh and blood, and so trying even to the faith and hope of a believer, could not be regarded by the apostle with indifference or unconcern; nay, had it been so considered by him, that very circumstance would materially impair the force of his statement. For it had been little to say, that having *no* fear of death, *no* shrinking from dissolution, he was willing to depart; but the force of his expression depends on this, that while, like other men, he had a natural fear of death, his faith was such as to surmount and overcome that fear, and to make him rejoice in the hope of glory. He felt, as we feel, that, in itself, death is a fearful, and a dark,

and a dreary passage ; he does not speak of it as an event to be chosen or desired for its own sake, but he says, that, when viewed as the gate into heaven, it stands connected with a prospect which reconciled him to its terrors. And by how much the fears of any believers respecting death are the more sensitive and overwhelming, just so much the more should we admire the power of that religion, which has enabled many a timid disciple to rise above his fears, and to take his flight to heaven on the wings of Christian hope.

There are many reasons why we, too, should be willing to depart. The chief reason that is assigned by the apostle is, as we have seen, the necessarily imperfect state of believers, so long as they remain in the body,—the necessity of walking by faith, and not by sight,—the absence, in one sense, of their glorified Lord,—as also, the presence and remaining power of indwelling sin. If, at death, we shall be freed from all these defects and encumbrances, and if we be now really born again, so as to have a taste and relish for spiritual perfection, to what can it be attributed that we are so unwilling to reach our home in heaven, except to the weakness of our faith and hope? Many of us may find a ground for deep humiliation before God in this matter, seeing that he who searcheth the heart, may even now observe much reluctance on our part to quit the body, and little or no desire to enjoy his immediate presence. And, as this can only be accounted for by referring it to the weakness of our

faith, or to the want of a well-grounded hope, so it will be found to be generally associated with an undue attachment to the world, and an aversion to part with all for God.

We shall not call in question the reality of any man's religion, merely on account of such feelings, for many of God's people are oftentimes in heaviness through manifold temptations, and they cannot always speak in the apostle's language; but surely *they* will not rest contented in a state which renders the thought of death a bondage, and the prospect of entering into heaven painful or depressing to them; they will seek to be resolved as to their interest in the promises, and will give all diligence to make their eternal prospects sure. It will be their sincere desire and endeavour to attain to the confidence, and to cherish the spirit of the apostle. It is both their duty and their interest to do so; their duty, as the professed followers of him "who is the resurrection and the life, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality clearly to light;" and their privilege, since nothing can be more blessed than that habit of believing expectation, which will reconcile them to whatever God may be pleased to appoint; and nothing, on the other hand, more wretched, or less becoming their profession, than that restless inquietude, that apprehensive alarm, that surprise and consternation, which the sudden prospect of dissolution, or even its slow but sure advance towards them, awakens in the mind, when it is still uncertain as to its future prospects, or yet more

wedded to the world, than wishful of heaven. We should be always ready,—ready not only as having a real interest in Christ, but as having a realizing faith in him, a watchful expectation of his coming, and a joyful welcome to him when he comes,—we must not only have lamps, but oil in our lamps; and, if we would not be taken by surprise, we must neither slumber nor sleep.

For our direction in this matter, let us remember that the apostle's willingness to depart arose out of, and stood connected with, an assurance of his personal interest in the scheme of grace—"we are *confident*, and willing to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord." This confidence at once explains and justifies his willingness to die. With such a confidence, it is not wonderful that he should express a desire to depart; but, while destitute of this, it is not to be expected that any human being will calmly contemplate death without apprehension, or encounter it without reluctance.

There can be no doubt, indeed, that every sincere believer who reposes his trust in the Saviour, is, in all essential respects, prepared for death and its issues; and that his faith, however weak and wavering, will infallibly secure for him the reward of a blessed immortality. Wherever it exists, and in whatever degree, faith obtains, for every penitent, the pardon of sin, and a sure title to an inheritance in heaven; and, in the same proportion in which it is active and influential, it prepares him also, in point of character,

for the services and enjoyments of that sacred asylum of piety and peace. In so far, therefore, as his mere safety is concerned, every sincere Christian is prepared for death, even though, for a season, he should be in heaviness through manifold temptations, or unable, by reason of weakness, to speak in the strong language of assurance or triumph. Christ "will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." But while, in respect of mere safety, all true believers are prepared for death and its issues, there is, in respect of sensible comfort, great diversity amongst them, according to their different degrees of faith and hope. Many are so weak in faith, that the prospect of encountering death, and of entering on the world of spirits, is fraught to them with unnumbered terrors,—their lives are spent in fearful apprehension of that event, which, nevertheless, they know to be inevitable,—health and prosperity are embittered by the thought of it, and, when disease comes, it comes attended with numerous desponding anticipations, and foreboding fears. There is reason to believe that not a few of the serious and sincere disciples of the Saviour are subject to these feelings; and, in their case, even the watchfulness which our Lord enjoins, is the means rather of increasing than of mitigating their distress, since, where a watchful expectation of death is exercised, without the enjoyment of a settled peace of mind and a lively hope, it tends much more to exasperate than to appease the anxieties which the thought of dissolution is fitted to excite.

The only sure antidote to these distressing feelings, is the confidence which the apostle expresses—a confidence of his personal interest in the salvation of the cross, in virtue of which he could look forward to a building of God, “an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” as his own, by sure title and promise, after the dissolution of the body. Nothing can be more certain, than that here, as elsewhere, in his precious writings, the apostle does express a sure hope of a blessed immortality, and that he does so, with no exclusive reference to his own case, but in the name of believers in general, to whom the same promises were addressed as to himself, and in whom, although it might be in different degrees, the same faith had been wrought. Nor can it be doubted that this confidence is a very high and precious privilege,—that, if attainable, it is in the very highest degree to be desired, and that being, in some sense, the natural fruit of an active faith, and the nourishment of a lively hope, the Christian is not only living far below his privileges, as a child of God, when he rests satisfied without this attainment, but is thereby showing that his faith is neither so active, nor his spiritual desires so strong, nor his love to God and to heaven so lively, as they ought to be.

That no man can be a genuine believer, or that no man will be saved, unless he can adopt the language which is here used, we will not affirm; but while the desponding and fearful ought not to be driven to despair, surely it is well that they should be admonished

of their remaining imperfections, and urged to aim at a privilege, which they will not deny to be a valuable one, and which the Gospel declares to have been enjoyed by others before them,—and that they should be affectionately reminded that, besides being a privilege, it is also a commanded duty, to “give all diligence to make their calling and election sure.”

The apostle states, in the preceding verses, the grounds or reasons of this confidence: “He that hath wrought us for this self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of his Spirit,—*therefore* we are always confident.” As it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that believers are wrought, fashioned, polished, and prepared for the upper sanctuary, so the fruits of the Spirit, being the evidence of a saving change, are at once the reasons of present assurance, and the earnest of future glory. Hence, it is said, “the Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God; and, if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.” And how does he thus bear witness? Not by revealing any truth which is not contained in Scripture, but by enabling them to embrace the truth of Scripture, and to appropriate its promises to themselves. Not by a secret voice, assuring them that their names are in the book of life, but by first producing in their souls, and then enabling them to perceive, those marks of saving grace, which will terminate in glory. But such a change may have been really wrought, and yet there may be seasons in the lives of

sincere Christians, in which they cannot so clearly discern the evidence, as to derive comfort from the persuasion, that they have been converted; seasons of spiritual darkness, when their views are clouded, it may be, by unbelief; or seasons of backsliding, when they have reason to mourn over resolutions which have been forgotten, vows that have been broken, and obligations, both of duty, and of gratitude, which have been shamefully violated; or seasons of spiritual insensibility, when they have so far fallen from the state of spiritual *health*, as to be almost tempted to question whether they have ever been quickened into *spiritual life*. At such seasons, it is not wonderful that they cannot, with a good conscience, use the language of the apostle. But dark as their present state is, it does not follow that they are shut out from hope. It is true that they cannot discern, in their own troubled spirits, those marks of grace which are the evidences of conversion, and the earnest of glory; and we cannot, therefore, in these circumstances, direct them to look inward on the frame of their own spirits, with any hope of their thereby obtaining relief. No; but we can, and we do, bid every downcast believer to look out of himself to Christ's cross, and to God's mercy-seat; and we do so with the greater confidence, just because he has been brought to feel that he has nothing else to depend on. Supposing all his fears as to his present state to be well-grounded, nevertheless, to him, be he converted or unconverted, the chief of sinners or the weakest of saints, to him, whatever be

his character, and however dark his prospects, we point to Christ's cross, as a refuge to which the most miserable is welcome to repair, and from which, never was the poorest penitent sent empty away. Let him not continue to brood over the darkness of his own soul, but, knowing it to be dark, let him turn his eye upward to the Sun of Righteousness, which has arisen upon him with healing in its beams, and which, notwithstanding all the gloom which hangs around his spirit, is still shining clear and serene in heaven. Let him look to Christ's cross and to God's mercy-seat; and thence may he draw, in the exercise of a simple and confiding faith, that assurance of God's love, and that peace of conscience, which will enable him to surmount the terrors of death, and to look forward with humble hope to a time when, no longer seeing through a glass darkly, he shall see face to face, and know even as also he is known.

This was the first ground of the apostle's confidence; he heard Christ's invitations and promises, he embraced them, and thereafter his experience of God's faithfulness confirmed his faith and animated his hope. At one time he had as little to comfort him in the prospect of death as any amongst ourselves; but he attained to confidence by the exercise of a simple faith. Let us aim at the same attainment by the same means. That this confidence is a highly desirable state of mind at all seasons, but especially in the near prospect of dissolution, will not surely be denied by any one, who, awake to the awful nature of that change, and the

eternal consequences which flow from it, will only ask himself the question,—whether it were best to die in doubt or in hope,—to be distracted at that solemn hour by the thought that, after all, he may be in the wrong path, or to be firmly assured, on grounds of rational conviction, that he is safe? Who would not wish, at that hour, to know, and to know assuredly, that he is in a state of peace with God,—that he is an heir of heaven, and not of hell? Or, could any thing be more terrific than to encounter death at the hazard of appearing before the judgment-seat unprepared? We must make up our minds, and arrive at some certainty on this matter. If we wish that our last moments may be undisturbed by misgivings, and that we may descend into the vale of death with serenity and composure, oh! let us not leave the task of winding up our accounts to that hour which will bring with it enough for us to think upon and to do, without being burdened with a long arrear from the past; let us now, and each day as we pass on to our final reckoning, examine and try the foundation of our hope; let us, once for all, satisfy ourselves as to the path which we should choose, and let it be that path in which we shall be content to meet death when it comes. Having chosen the right way, let us go right on, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left; setting our faces stedfastly to go up to the Jerusalem above; let us seek to enjoy, more and more, the love of God, and communion with him; to become more submissive to his will, and more conformed to his divine image; for then, and then only,

may we be both prepared for heaven, and assured of our inheritance there ; and we shall be happy, either in his service here, or in his presence hereafter, if, only walking in the path of sanctification, we have "the earnest of his Spirit" in our hearts.



MEDITATION XII.

Ps. CXIX. 50.—“THIS IS MY COMFORT IN MINE AFFLICTION:”

“*Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.*”—JAMES V. 13.

THE Bible opens a spring of comfort for the afflicted, by giving them free access to the throne of grace, and inviting them to enjoy the privilege of prayer.

This is, indeed, the Christian's privilege at all seasons; and never will he feel himself to be in a right or comfortable state, whatever may be his outward prosperity, if he allow himself to neglect that blessed ordinance, by which intercourse is maintained betwixt heaven and earth, and fellowship enjoyed by the creature with the Creator. And he who, whether in prosperity or adversity, makes it his daily practice to go to the throne of grace, and in *every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, makes his request known unto God, will, from his own experience, bear testimony to the truth of the promise, that “the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus.”

But while prayer is a duty incumbent at all seasons, and a privilege which the highest prosperity affords no reason for neglecting, it is, in many respects, peculiarly seasonable in the time of affliction.

Affliction is *favourable to the spirit of prayer*. For, wherein does the true nature of prayer consist? It consists in the *desire of the heart*, offered up to God; and what better fitted to awaken earnest desire than the pressure of affliction? In the day of prosperity, when every want or appetite of our nature is supplied, we may not be conscious of any very strong desire, and are too apt to forget the fact of our dependence, in respect to the supply of our temporal wants; and even in regard to our spiritual necessities, we are prone, when surfeited with worldly prosperity, to become cold and lukewarm in our desires after the communication of divine grace, by which alone they can be supplied. Is there one Christian who has not experienced the deadening effect of uninterrupted prosperity on the spiritual desires and holiest affections of his nature? And if even Christians are too often lulled asleep by its influence, how much more may those be cradled into profound forgetfulness of God, who have never known the necessity, nor made the deliberate choice, of a better and more enduring portion? But when their prosperous course is broken by severe affliction, the minds of both classes are brought into a new state; the Christian is then thrown back on the inward resources of his religion, and will then feel their necessity and value; and even in an unsanctified bosom,

such strong natural longings will spring up, as may, under the blessing of God, lead the worldling himself to seek after a better portion than the world. In so far as affliction is the means of awakening earnest desire, and exciting a *sincere* feeling in the heart, it is favourable to the spirit of prayer; for that feeling, or that desire, if directed towards God, is prayer.

Again, prayer is an *expression of our dependence on God*; and it is in affliction that we are most sensible of our helplessness,—it is by affliction that we are made to feel how little of what most nearly concerns our happiness is under our own control, and how absolutely our interests are at the disposal of a higher power. What, for instance, can impress the mind with so deep a sense of helplessness, as the pressure of disease in our own persons, which no human skill can arrest or cure; or the gradual decay and final dissolution of a beloved friend, at whose couch we watch by day and by night, and are only more and more confirmed in the conviction, that unless God interpose, vain is the help of man? In so far as affliction teaches us our dependence on God, it is favourable to the spirit of prayer; for why, in such circumstances, should we refrain from expressing that dependence which we feel, and acknowledging that helplessness which we cannot deny, especially when we know that God has a sovereign control over all events, and that, if we procure his aid, we obtain the benefit of unerring wisdom and almighty power?

Again, affliction is favourable to the spirit of prayer,

because, when it is either sudden or severe, it is usually associated in the minds of men *with a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of divine displeasure*. We insist not on the reasons of it, but on the bare fact that such an apprehension is universally felt by those who are exposed to imminent danger, or plunged in deep distress; and that, by the constitution of our nature, such a connection is established betwixt suffering and sin, as that the former cannot be, to any great extent, endured, without being accompanied with a deep sense of personal demerit and guilt. That such a connection does exist, is evident from the dreadful apprehensions which are experienced and expressed by the most ungodly and careless, when they are suddenly brought into imminent danger. Many will then *tremble*, and think of God, who cared nothing for religion before. Have we not seen a family, enjoying a long course of prosperity, and as unmindful of God and religion, as if they were ignorant that they had a God to worship, and souls to be saved; but when one of their number was suddenly seized by the hand of death, the whole of that gay household were also seized with religious fear, and none more anxious than they to procure the aid of a minister's consolations, and a minister's prayers! Have we not known a rude and thoughtless sailor, spending every hour of fair weather and prosperous winds in jovial mirth,—night after night retiring to his cot without thinking of the God above, or of the hell beneath him,—and even, when the first gale arose that was to found his ship, reck-

less of the coming storm ; but when the crash was heard, and when, from the force of habit, the first word upon his lip was an oath, that oath died away into a prayer, when the foaming waters burst across the deck, and lashed him into the mighty deep ! In the 107th Psalm, we find the tendency of affliction to produce prayer illustrated by many beautiful examples, —as in the case of the Jews wandering in the wilderness, in a solitary way, hungry and thirsty, and their souls fainting within them ; or in the case of those who, by reason of personal distress, “ sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron, because they rebelled against the words of God ;” or in the case of those who go down to the sea in ships, whose soul is melted because of trouble ; —in each case, it is added, “ they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.”

It is true, that in all these cases, prayer may, in the first instance, be nothing more than the cry of nature in distress ; the desires of such persons may not, at the outset, be purely spiritual ; and the sense of guilt which they experience, may be more characterised by the terrors of remorse, than by the tenderness of true repentance. Be it so ; this does not hinder the usefulness of affliction, as a means in God’s hand, of leading them to pray. God acts on the minds of men by rational inducements ; and seeing that, in their natural state, they are dead to the influence of higher and more spiritual motives, he has recourse to their sen-

tient nature ; their hopes and their fears are addressed in the promises and threatenings of Scripture, and their love of happiness, and aversion to suffering, are appealed to in the absence of holier principles. When he sends affliction, he appeals to their natural feelings ; and the lessons which it is fitted to teach, are so many motives to a religious life,—motives which, although, in the first instance, addressed to the mere natural feelings, and hopes, and fears of the sufferer, may, nevertheless, through these, arrest the attention, and reach the conscience, and ultimately renew the heart. The impressions which are made during a season of affliction, may be the result, in a great measure, of mere natural feeling ; but they may, nevertheless, be the means which the Holy Spirit has chosen for the commencement of a saving change ; and if they lead the sufferer *to pray*, they bring him under a new influence, whereby the sentient feelings which at first prompted him, may gradually and imperceptibly rise into gracious and devout affections. At all events, let no sufferer be debarred from the throne of grace, because he is in doubt as to the spirituality of his affections, or depressed by a sense of guilt ; let him remember, that *as a sinner* he is invited, and that his present affliction is designed to induce him to pray ; and should he still question his warrant or his prospect of acceptance, let him remember the words of the apostle to Simon Magus,—“Thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity ; but pray to God if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee.”

In the case of backsliders, too, who have fallen from their first love, and have become conformed to the world, affliction is often sent as the most suitable means of reclaiming them from declension, and restoring them to spiritual health. This it does, by leading them to pray. Oh ! how many Christians have had reason to acknowledge the blessed effect of affliction, in renewing their communion with God, and reviving their decayed devotion ! Are there not many who can testify, from their own experience, that while they were prosperous, the spirit of devotion became imperceptibly more languid in their bosoms ; that instead of frequently enjoying prayer as a delightful privilege, they were gradually losing their relish for it, and that when they did observe it, it was observed in a cold and formal manner ; and that they were not sensible of the length to which they had proceeded in spiritual declension, till, by some severe stroke of affliction, they were thrown on the resources of a piety too decayed to afford them either support or consolation, and were thus, for the first time, apprised of a danger till then unperceived ? Can they not remember what deep humiliation, what earnest desires, and what fervent supplications were produced by that affliction, and the discoveries which it enabled them to make ? and are they not sensible, that it was in prayer they found their consolation,—when, with their eyes opened to the reality of their condition, they besought the Lord with tears ? Indeed, one of the greatest benefits of severe affliction, in the case of God's people, is, that

it awakens them to greater ardour and diligence in prayer; and such is the blessedness of communion with God, and such the elevating and sanctifying effect of earnest prayer, that were affliction productive of no other benefit, this alone might well compensate for all the loss which is sustained, and all the pain which is inflicted, even by the severest dispensations of providence.

As affliction prepares the mind for prayer, *so prayer relieves the mind in affliction.*

Prayer is often the means of averting the evils with which we are threatened, and of delivering us from those under which we labour. Its *efficacy*, both for defence and delivery, is frequently stated in express terms, and illustrated by striking examples in the Sacred Writings.

It is recorded of Hezekiah, that when he heard the message of God by the mouth of Isaiah the prophet, saying, "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live," he "turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight: and Hezekiah wept sore. Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add to thy days fifteen years." "And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs; and they took and laid it on the boil, and he

recovered." * Thus was a sore disease removed, and early death prevented by the efficacy of prayer; and Hezekiah had reason to sing for joy: "Thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption, for thou hast cast all my sins behind my back; the Lord *was ready to save me*, therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."

The history of the people of Israel affords many interesting examples of the effect of prayer in delivering from outward trouble, as well as of the tendency of affliction to impress the most careless with the necessity and value of prayer. These examples are thus beautifully referred to in the 107th Psalm: "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness." Again, referring to the grievous backslidings of that highly favoured people, the Psalmist says: "They rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High; *therefore* he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down and there was none to help; they sat in

* Isaiah xxxviii. ; 2 Kings xx.

darkness and the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. And after referring to other examples of a similar nature, the Psalmist represents them as manifestations of a goodness which is ever ready to be exercised towards the afflicted,—“whoso is wise and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.”

Nor was the efficacy of prayer, in preventing or removing trouble, confined to the Jewish people, although they lived under a dispensation which was in many respects supernatural and miraculous; we are taught, on the contrary, to regard the examples which their history presents, as so many indications of the unalterable principles on which the general government of the world is conducted; and in so far as the point now before us is concerned, the same principle is recognised and embodied in a promise in the New Testament itself: “If any man is afflicted, let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sin, it shall be forgiven him.” And in more general terms, our Lord has said to all his disciples, “Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.” “Whatsoever ye ask in my name, believing, ye shall receive.”

To this, many may be ready to oppose their own

experience, and may be unwilling to admit the efficacy of prayer in preventing or removing outward calamity, when they remember with what frequency and earnestness they supplicated for mercies which were, nevertheless, withheld, and deprecated trials which were, nevertheless, sent or continued with them. They may remember that, when threatened with bereavement, they wept sore, and besought the Lord to spare and restore the object of their fond affections; and yet, that he allowed disease to take its course, until it terminated in death. These facts, which no Christian minister will seek either to deny or to conceal, may have had the effect of staggering the belief of many in the efficacy of prayer; and where they have not had this effect, they may occasionally embarrass even the minds of believers, and overwhelm them with deep anxiety, by suggesting the awful thought, that, since their prayers have received no direct answer, they must either not be of the number of God's people at all, or they must "have prayed amiss."

But these conclusions are not warranted by Scripture, and they arise from a misapprehension, not so much of the promise annexed to prayer, as of the very nature of prayer itself. No prayer is scriptural which does not express a desire in unison with the will of God; and where the purpose of God is, as in most cases it must be, secret or unknown to us, no prayer is scriptural in which the expression of our own desire is not limited by a holy acquiescence in his will. We are not entitled, for example, to pray absolutely that

God's chastening hand may be withdrawn from us, or that the life of a relative may be spared, or that we may be blessed with worldly prosperity ;—all these desires, however natural and however strong, must be limited by, and subordinated to, the will of him who knoweth what is best for us, and who has graciously taken the management of our case into his own hands. This is strikingly implied in the very structure of that form of prayer which our Lord himself gave to his disciples ; for it is a very remarkable fact, that the three first petitions of that prayer are expressive of a desire for God's glory, acquiescence in God's will, and zeal for the extension of his kingdom ; and it is not till after we have thus ascribed sovereignty to Jehovah, and cast ourselves absolutely into his hands, that we are permitted to broach one petition for our own particular interest, even to the extent of daily bread !

It is only, therefore, when our desires are in unison with the divine will, that we have reason to expect a direct fulfilment of our requests. And this consideration is fraught with much interesting instruction, and with great practical comfort in regard to the efficacy of prayer ; for it assures us, that if we should happen to pray in a right spirit, but, from ignorance, should ask what is not really good for us, God will not take advantage of our ignorance or weakness, so as to visit us with a curse when we are seeking a blessing. There can be no doubt that, were every desire which we express in prayer to meet with a direct and literal fulfilment, the efficacy of prayer might, through our

ignorance of what is really for our good, become a source of calamity rather than of comfort. As it is related of one who, being possessed of great wealth, and having an only son, and that son labouring under a very sore disease, and being repeatedly counselled to resign him into God's hand, and to acquiesce in his appointment, even should he be pleased to take him away, did, nevertheless, so far yield to his natural affections, as resolutely to refuse any act of submission, and could not bring himself to utter one word of acquiescence in such a result, and who, many years after, was seen dishonoured and beaten in his old age, by that very son whom he was so loath to lose, and mourning, in the bitterness of his heart, over filial ingratitude and disobedience, as the heaviest curse of his grey hairs ! But when our petition is limited by acquiescence in the sovereign disposal of Almighty God, even should we ask amiss, God will neither withhold what is truly good for us, nor give what he knows to be bad. And thus the omniscient wisdom of God is our security against the effect of our own ignorance, or weakness in prayer.*

It is chiefly in reference to external comforts or privileges that we are ignorant of God's will and our own interest, for, on that subject, we have no revelation to guide us ; but for spiritual blessings, in so far

* Even a heathen could say,

*Ζῆν βασιλεῦ τὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ καὶ εὐχομένοις καὶ ἀνέυκτοις
Ἀμμι δίδου, τὰ δὲ δεινὰ καὶ εὐχομένοις ἀπαλέξῃν κτελεῖ.*

Ex Alcibiade Secundo.

as these are necessary for the safety of the soul, we have a stronger assurance of an answer, in proportion as we have better evidence both of its being God's will to bestow, and of its being our interest to receive them. It may be doubtful how far God will be pleased to grant, or how far it would be for our real welfare to obtain, exemption from outward trials or the uninterrupted enjoyment of worldly prosperity ; but we know from Scripture, that the blessings of God's grace are of such a nature, that we must at all times be willing to dispense them, and that we cannot pray for, or receive them, without being substantially benefited. We have greater confidence, therefore, of a literal fulfilment of our petitions, when we supplicate the grace of a penitent spirit, than when we pray for a prosperous outward estate, since the former must, at all times, be an object of complacency to God, and a real blessing to ourselves, whereas the latter may be fraught with danger to our higher interests, and may, therefore, by unerring wisdom, be withheld.

In this view, also, our prayers may be really answered, although the special evil which we deprecate is, nevertheless, inflicted, and the good which we supplicate is, nevertheless, withheld. For what is our prayer? Why, that God would deal with us according to the counsels of unerring wisdom, and give or withhold according to his sovereign will. That being our prayer, it is answered, even though it should be by crosses. And, in this, God magnifies his grace, by bringing the substantial blessings which we need out of the

unlikeliest means, nay, out of those very evils which we are most eager to avoid. We see, hence, not only that the prayers of his people are answered, but that they cannot fail to have their fulfilment. For the desires of their hearts are going forth in unison with the divine will, and that will is omnipotent!

In these circumstances, however, the unbelieving mind will be ready to reason against the utility of prayer altogether, and to say that God's will, being omnipotent, must have its effect, whether we pray or no. But, by those who can entertain this idea, it is not duly considered, that prayer is in the moral, what any other ordinary cause is in the physical world,—a means established by God himself,—a link in the grand chain of cause and effect, which not only comprehends both the physical and moral departments of his government, but combines the two, and establishes a very intimate relation betwixt their several parts,—a cause, in fact, which is not less regarded by God than any other secondary agent in nature. It might, therefore, with the same propriety be affirmed, that God's omnipotent will must cause the predetermined harvest to spring up from the earth, without the agency of manual labour, as that God's will must cause the fulfilment of such of our desires as are in unison therewith, without the agency of prayer. And, be it observed, that even were we unable to obviate the difficulty, we cannot fail, at least, to perceive, that it is founded on a principle directly the reverse of that on which our Lord argued; for, so far from regarding the infinite knowledge, or

the sovereign will, or the almighty power of God, as superseding the necessity of prayer on the part of man, he refers to these as the very ground and reason, nay, as the strongest motive and encouragement of prayer: "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." Were we to act on any other principle, we must virtually declare that we will not pray, unless we are allowed to dictate to God, or assured that our desires shall overrule the decision of omniscient wisdom!

Even when prayer is not effectual in averting or removing the evil which we fear or endure, yet it imparts to the believing mind the strongest of all consolation,—that which arises from the persuasion that God's will is answered by the event, and that any other result would have been, in the judgment of unerring wisdom, neither so good in itself, nor so beneficial to our real interest. If, when threatened with a painful bereavement, the Christian shall so far forget his duty and his privilege, as to omit prayer,—after the event has occurred, he must, if he reflect at all, be distressed by the thought, that timous prayer might have been the appointed means, for aught he knows, of averting that heavy calamity, and that, having omitted the use of that means, he is now reaping the bitter fruits of his own negligence. But if he has made the threatened visitation a subject of frequent and earnest prayer, and if he has been enabled, in the spirit of childlike submission, to commit the whole case into God's hand, then, even should the calamity befall him, he has the

consolation of knowing, that no negligence on his part provoked the interposition of God, nay, that the event was absolutely necessary, in the opinion of One who knows his whole condition and prospects, and who has taken the sole management of his affairs.

Thus did David act in the case of his child, and thus was he comforted : “ The Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child ; and David fasted, and went in and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the earth ; but he would not, neither would he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead ; for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice ; how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead ? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead ; therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead ? and they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came *into the House of the Lord, and worshipped*. Then he came to his own house, and, when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done ? thou didst fast and weep for the child while it was alive ; but when the child was dead, thou didst

arise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? but now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Thus also did St Paul act in similar circumstances; and he records, as the result of his prayer, that the outward calamity which he deprecated was continued with him, but that it was greatly overbalanced by an enlarged communication of divine grace: "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given unto me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, *My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* Most gladly, *therefore*, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Besides its effect in averting threatened calamity, or procuring positive blessings at the hand of God, prayer exercises a *beneficial influence* on the mind, and thus fits it for suffering, and relieves it when calamity comes.

The degree of sorrow that is occasioned by afflic-

tion depends a great deal more on the state of mind in which it finds the sufferer, than on the amount of the calamity itself. The same trial which overwhelms one, may be sustained with composure and comfort by another, and that, too, although both are equally sensitive in their feelings. This difference depends on the preparation which they have respectively made for the event. If the one has been careless, while the other was thoughtful, and, above all, if the one has been negligent in fortifying his mind by prayer and supplication, while the other, under a deep sense of his liability to affliction, and his dependence on God, has betaken himself, in the exercise of humble trust and confidence, to the throne of grace, and has been enabled there to repose the burden of his anxieties on the Lord, it cannot but be that the latter will feel very differently from the former, when the event occurs. And that event, however calamitous in itself, will be the less overwhelming to him, in proportion as he was the better prepared to meet it, and the more accustomed to regard it in connection with the will of him, who is at once the God of Providence, and the hearer of prayer.

And as prayer, offered up in anticipation of suffering, puts the soul in a right state of preparation, so, by virtue of its natural influence, it has the effect of relieving the mind of those feelings, which severe calamity, when it does come, must, in all cases, in a greater or less degree, awaken. Prayer before affliction, fits the mind for suffering ; prayer under affliction, relieves the mind

of its sorrow. So long as the feelings of the sufferer are restrained and pent up within his own bosom, they prey upon his internal peace; but when they find a channel through which they obtain utterance and expansion, their depressing power is mitigated, and the heart is, in part at least, relieved of its burden. Hence excessive grief is often mitigated by copious weeping,—much more by communion with a dear and confidential friend,—but most of all by prayer, which is *the heart's communion* with God, the best and nearest of friends. Those who have witnessed the strong agony of grief, occasioned by some sudden and unexpected calamity, and have watched, with intense anxiety, its progress and results, can best appreciate the benefit of such outlets to human feeling, and they will testify, that so soon as the grief of their friend found vent in tears or in free conversation, they felt that the worst was already past. And, above all, if the sufferer retired to his chamber, and, on his bended knees, poured out his soul to God in the confidence of prayer, a calm serenity and composure ensued, which showed that the crisis was over, and that, too, although he may have prayed with strong crying and tears. It may be difficult to account for the relief which a suffering spirit derives from the gushing of tears, unless it be resolved into a natural harmony between the physiology of the body, and the deep emotions of the mind. It may be difficult also, in some cases, to account for the relief that is derived from the mere utterance of the heart's fulness into the ear of another, unless it be referred to

the principle of sympathy, whose law seems to be, "that it redoubleth joys, and cutteth griefs in halves; for, as there is no man that imparteth his joys to his friend, but he joyeth the more, so there is no man that imparteth his griefs to his friend, but he grieveth the less." * But, whatever difficulty may be felt in ascertaining the reason why such outlets of feeling are so proverbially the means of relieving sorrow, surely there can be none in accounting for the relief which a pious mind experiences in unbosoming its sorrows in the very presence and ear of its God. For there, at his footstool, who dare arraign the wisdom, or blame the rectitude, or question the sovereignty of him from whom affliction comes? In prayer, the mind is brought into immediate contact with the Supreme Will; the sovereignty of God is recognised and felt; the wisdom of his dispensations acknowledged; and the very misery which leads the sufferer to the throne of grace, is the means of placing him in a position in which he feels that he must adore the divine goodness, and trust in it still, notwithstanding all that has occurred, otherwise he has neither help nor hope. By the very act of bending the knee before his footstool, the Christian makes all these acknowledgments, and gives a practical expression of his confidence in God's faithfulness and love,—he repairs to God as his friend—a friend that will not leave him nor forsake him. And if such acknowledgments be made, and such feelings awaken-

• LORD BACON.

ed, in the hour of prayer, is not his spirit thereby placed in the best condition for at once procuring the mitigation of his sorrow, and improving by the calamity which has called it forth? It is, indeed, wonderful, how the mind clears up its views of God's dispensations, while engaged in prayer. At first, thick clouds may seem to darken his prospect, but, as he proceeds, streaks of light break through, and shine in upon his spirit, and, "while he sits in darkness, the Lord is a light to him." "While David kept silence, his bones waxed old, through his roaring all the day long;" while "he restrained prayer, his spirit was straitened;" but no sooner did he pour out his heart before God, than he "was compassed about with songs of deliverance." In such a case, much sorrow may still remain, but the bitterness of grief is past. The subdued and humble feeling which affliction is designed to produce, and by which it operates, in part, its beneficial results, will characterise the sufferer, long after the agony of grief has subsided into calm resignation. His soul will no longer resemble the troubled sea which cannot rest, but will be like "a weaned child." And this wholesome conversion of the excitement of violent sorrow into the mild virtue of suffering affliction with patience, is best produced by the agency of prayer.

Such is the natural and necessary connection betwixt affliction and prayer;—affliction prepares the mind for prayer, and prayer relieves the mind under affliction. But let it not be expected that prayer is to operate as a charm, or that it must be productive of instantaneous

relief in all cases to the same extent. We have been speaking of the influence of prayer on the mind of a religious sufferer ; one who has sincerely embraced the truth, and habitually lived under the control of Christianity. The same effects cannot, at least in the same degree, or all at once, be expected to flow from a hasty recourse to God, when calamity comes on one who has long forgotten and abandoned God and his service. In such a case, the sorrow arising from outward calamity will be aggravated, in the first instance, by the consciousness of past neglect, even in a mind which has never altogether disavowed the Christian faith ; and one of the severest struggles which affliction will awaken in the bosom of such a man, will be that betwixt a sense of duty or of danger, on the one hand, which impels him to think of repairing to God for help, and a fearful misgiving, on the other, as to God's willingness to receive and welcome him, after such long and guilty estrangement. And even, should the former impulse prevail so as to make him bend his knee in God's presence, his heart will still be straitened by fear, or chilled by doubt, or stung with remorse, such as are unknown to the man whose heart has been enlarged and cheered by frequent communion with God, as a tried and constant friend. Nevertheless, let not even the most guilty or negligent despair, or give up the effort, under the pressure of such feelings ; let them be well assured, that all guilty as they are, God is waiting to be gracious to them ; that to them, not less than to others, is the warrant of prayer addressed, and

that to them, not less than to others, is the warrant of prayer addressed, and the promise of an answer given ; that at God's right hand the Redeemer himself is ready to receive their petitions, and to present them with acceptance ; and that, for aught they know, the calamity which has befallen them was sent for the express purpose of awakening them to a sense of their guilt, in so long neglecting his worship, and of *forcing them*, when they would not be persuaded by gentler methods, to pray. Before they adopt the desperate resolution of abandoning this privilege, it becomes them seriously to consider that they may thus frustrate the very purpose of God in sending affliction ; that if they give up prayer, they give up all help and hope ; that nothing else remains for them but to endure sufferings, without being sanctified by them ; and that if they *will not pray* when God chastises them, nothing on earth is likely to make them pray, until that hour shall come when prayer itself will be unavailing ; and when, in answer to their importunate cry, " Lord, Lord, open unto us," they will hear only these awful words, " I never knew you, depart from me ;"—" for when I called, ye refused ; when I stretched out my hand, no man regarded ; ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof ; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me,—for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord."

Is any man afflicted? Let him *go this instant* to prayer!

In addition to his own supplications, the mourner is exhorted to avail himself of the intercession of others. "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise them up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." Part of the promise here annexed to prayer, was, we have reason to believe, peculiar to the times of the apostles, when some were endowed with the gift of healing; but while, in modern times, we are not warranted to expect miraculous cures, we are still encouraged to pray, in the assurance, that if it be really good for them, the sick shall be restored, and that, at all events, their sins shall be forgiven. They are exhorted, in the first instance, to call on the office-bearers of the church, the elders or presbyters, who are elsewhere spoken of as constituting two classes, the one appointed to preach the word and to administer the sacraments, the other, as helps for the right government and edification of the church. The second class, who are commonly called elders, are exempted from the more public ministrations of the word, but may be both lawfully and usefully employed in visiting the sick and ministering to their instruction and comfort in private. And surely it is a blessed task, the most blessed in which any man can be engaged, to pour into the wounded spirit the oil of consolation, to

comfort those that mourn, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to make the desolate glad !

But this privilege is not confined to the office-bearers of the Christian Church. The disciples at large are exhorted to comfort each other by their mutual prayers ; for, addressing the whole body of the disciples, the apostle adds, “ confess your faults,” *i. e.*, not your private sins, but those faults by which you have injured or offended your brother,—“ confess your faults one to another, and *pray* one for another ; the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Where real religion prevails, there will be much profitable intercourse of this nature amongst the serious members of the church ; and it speaks little for the state of religion in any place, where none save the minister can be found to pray by the bed of sickness or of death.

But let it not be supposed by the people, that the intercessory prayer of others is to supersede their personal supplications, or that it will avail for their benefit while they continue to neglect their own duty. There is, I fear, much misconception—misconception approaching very near to superstition—in the minds of many on this subject. They seem to look on the prayer of a minister in the time of sickness, or at the hour of death, as nothing more than a decent observance, conformable to the custom of the country in which they live ; or as a charm which is to operate apart from all other means of a moral nature ;—else, why is sickness allowed to take its course till insensi-

bility ensue, before the minister is sent for? and why are a few words of prayer more eagerly sought than the instructions which he may deem necessary to arouse, or awaken, or convince the dying sufferer? And if it be thus regarded, what substantial difference exists betwixt the prayer of a Protestant minister and the extreme unction of a Romish priest? The prayer of a minister is of no avail, unless it lead the patient to think, and to believe, and to pray for himself; it is a *moral means*, fitted to enlighten the mind and to soften the heart of the sufferer; but if no such effect ensue, it is practically useless. A minister cannot pray a man into heaven against his will; it is by his own will being moved and going forth in earnest supplication, that the mighty change is effected; and let it never be forgotten, that while the apostle exhorts the afflicted to call for the elders of the church, the command is equally express—"Is any among *you* afflicted? let *him* pray."

It sometimes happens, that when a member of a family is smitten with disease, and the symptoms are such as to awaken very serious apprehensions as to the result, the parents, or others in charge, refrain from requesting the attendance of a minister or elder, nay, are anxious to exclude all such from the sick-room, owing to a very mistaken delicacy which makes them afraid to show any symptoms of apprehension, lest the disease should thereby be aggravated, or the last moments of the sufferer disturbed. If such persons be decided infidels, their conduct may be accounted for,

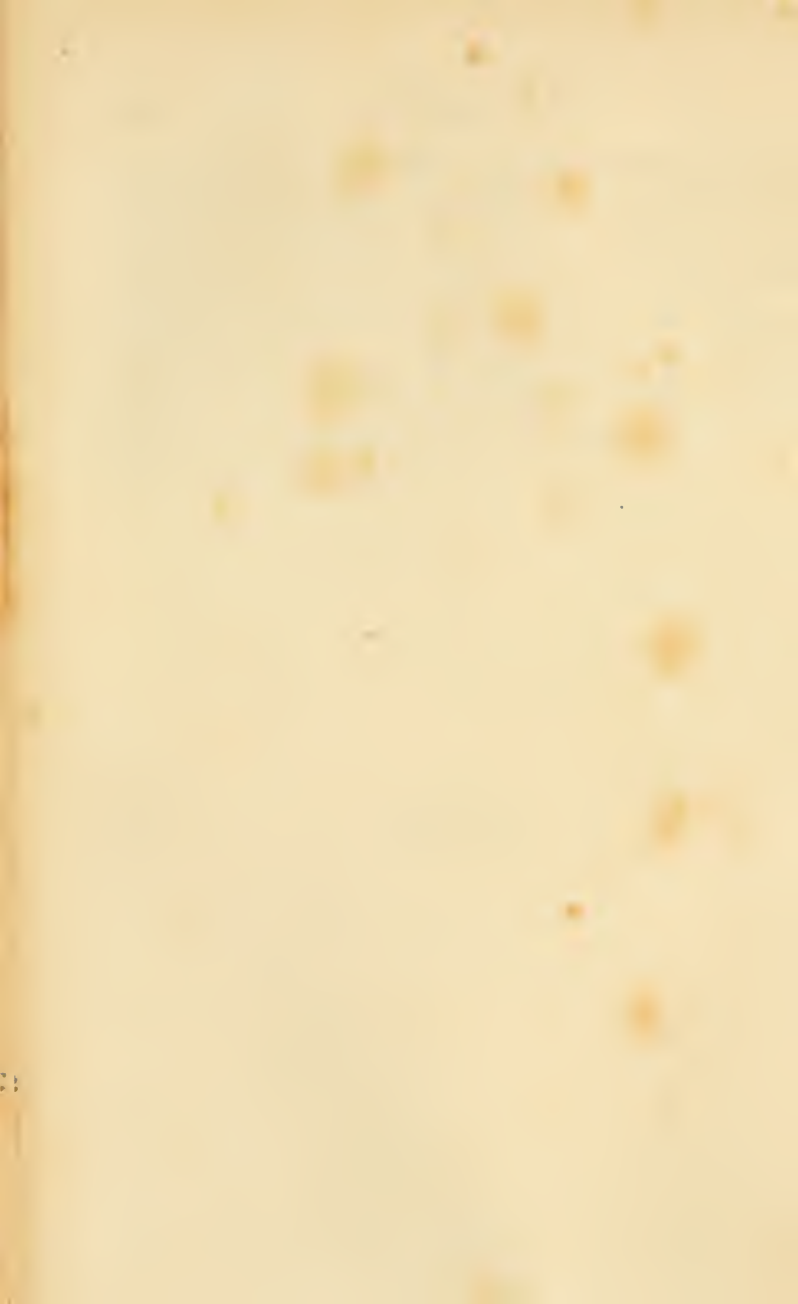
although, like every other effect of infidelity, it is deeply to be deplored ; but if they be professing Christians, how can we sufficiently reprobate the insensibility which would leave the helpless sufferer to sink unconsciously into the grave, without any means being used to prepare him for that eternity on which he must soon enter ? Above all, what shall we say, if, besides excluding the minister of religion from that death-bed, they have neither the kindness nor the courage to kneel down beside it themselves, and pour out their hearts in prayer ? Oh ! this cold, frigid, nominal Christianity, is as unsuitable to a death-bed as infidelity itself ; and cheerless, indeed, is that household where the voice of prayer is not heard, even when an immortal spirit is quitting it for heaven or for hell !

It is not the least of the many advantages attending the regular observance of family worship, that provision is thus made, beforehand, for this exercise, in such seasons of affliction as may be expected to occur in every household ; and that, without any violent effort, or any departure from ordinary custom, parents, children, and servants, may unite together in prayer, on behalf of any one of their number that has been smitten by disease ; that their benevolent affections are thus at once expressed and strengthened ; and that, as disease advances to its consummation, their minds are gradually, and almost imperceptibly, prepared for the event. And, oh ! it is sweet to the sufferer that he is thus remembered ! Especially, if a member of that

household be smitten with disease, while he is at a distance from home, and suddenly brought to the gates of death, is it no consolation to him to be assured, that at a certain hour each day, father and mother, sisters and brothers, will remember him at the throne? and is it not equally consoling to them, that, far as he is beyond the reach of their personal attentions, they can thus commit him to the care of an Omnipresent God!

THE END.











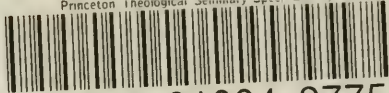
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